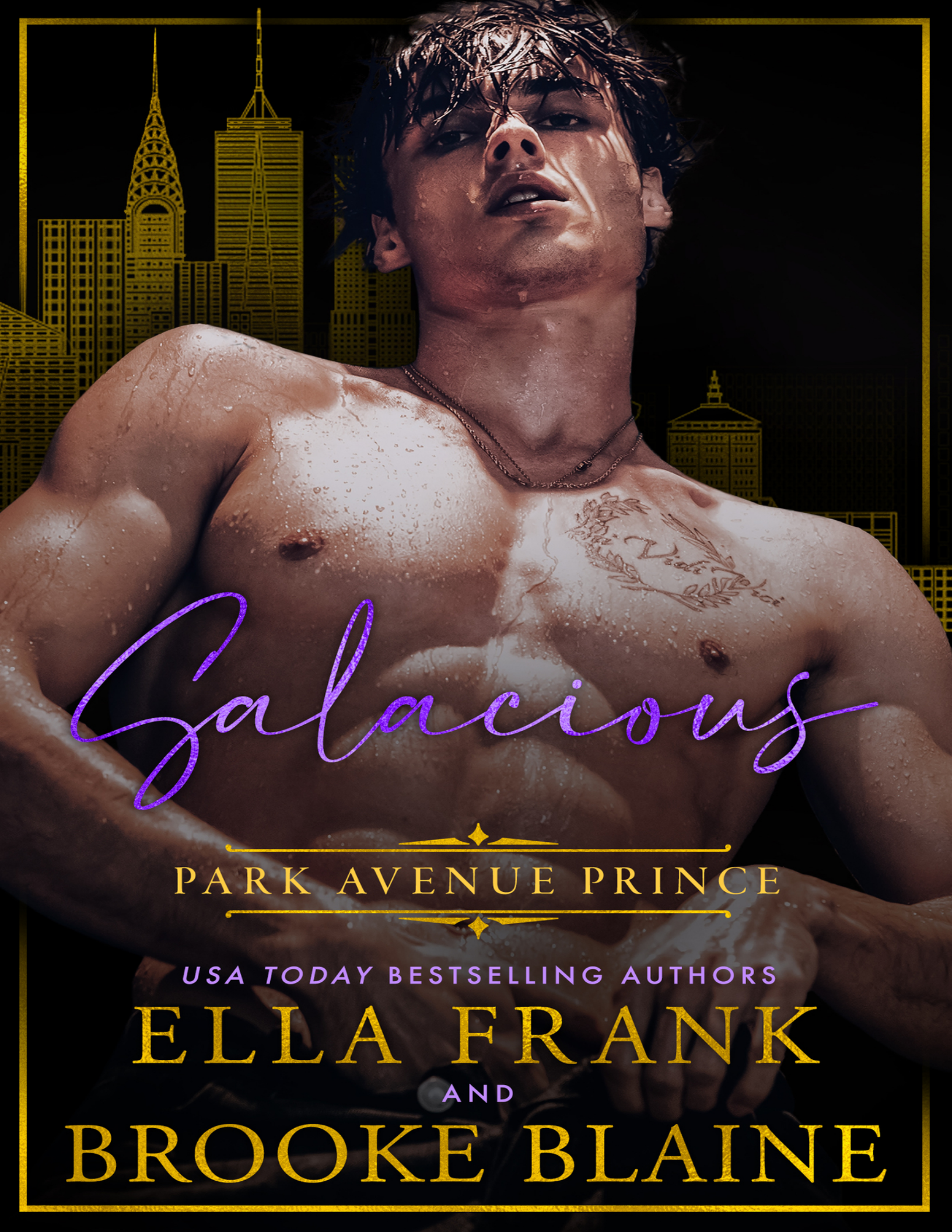
Salacious
PARK AVENUE PRINCE
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS
ELLA FRANK
AND
BROOKE BLAINE

salacious park avenue prince

ELLA FRANK

BROOKE BLAINE

OceanofPDF.com

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www.ellafrank.com

www.BrookeBlaine.com

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Cover Design: Hang Le
Cover Photo: Ren Saliba
Edited by Arran McNicol

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synopsis

Who are we? Like you even need to ask. We're the seven richer-than-sin legacies causing debauchery at the prestigious Astor University in Manhattan.
Some call us spoiled.
Some call us trouble.
But *everyone* calls us the Park Avenue Princes.

Travis McKinney
"The Outrageous One"

Or, as some of my fellow Park Avenue Princes like to call me, the Manwhore of Manhattan.
Act like a sex god, dress like a sex god, be a sex god. In my opinion, these are fantastic life goals. I have no idea why my parents think I have no direction.

I'm the fun one. Easygoing. A massive flirt. I get along with just about everyone, except…

Caleb Reeves.
Also known as "the Bane of My Existence"

He's everything I'm not: Focused, effortlessly sexy but straight, and an ex-Park Avenue Prince. Or the "Pricks," as he likes to call us now.

Our rivalry is legendary. Putting us within a hundred feet of each other is just asking for trouble. But no one other than the two of us knows why or how it began, and we plan to keep it that way.

The unspoken agreement is that Caleb keeps to his side of the city, I keep to mine, and we avoid each other at all costs.

Which would be great, except we have to see each once a month at family dinner.

Because Caleb isn't only my arch-nemesis, he also happens to be…my stepbrother.

Salacious Park Avenue Prince is the fifth standalone novel in the Park Avenue Princes world.

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Thank You
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ONE

travis

Four Years Earlier

"I NOW PRONOUNCE you husband and wife."

The crowd of hundreds gathered in the Grand Ballroom at New York's prestigious Plaza Hotel broke into thunderous applause as my mom, celebrated actress Vera McKinney, kissed her man, also known as her second husband and Wall Street executive Richard Reeves.

From beside his dad, serving as best man, Caleb Reeves grinned at the happy couple, and when he looked past my mom to where I stood next to her—also as best man, because this was no maid-of-honor shit—his smile widened.

This night had been a long time coming, three years of all four of us playing house together, and now it was finally official. Caleb wasn't just my best friend anymore—he was my stepbrother.

I shot him a wink just as Mom turned around, leaning in to kiss my cheek.

"Congratulations," I said, handing her the extravagant bouquet I'd been in charge of during the ceremony. The trim went well with my tuxedo, a black and gold damask couture number, so I hadn't minded the accessory, even if Caleb hadn't held one. As it was, he'd gone with a classic black tux, so it looked better with me anyway.

Applause continued as I joined Caleb to follow after our parents down the aisle.

“Well, well, well,” I said, smirking. “Looks like you can’t get rid of me now.”

“Oh shit. No takebacks?”

“Nope.”

“Huh. Guess you’re stuck with me too, then, *stepbrother*.” Grinning like a fiend, he threw his arm around my shoulders, and I did the same as we headed past all the guests, which included several of our friends making lewd gestures like idiots. I’d made sure they were on the guest list, but it looked like they’d all been dipping into the flasks I saw them filling up while we were getting ready. The reception would have an open bar, but my mom wouldn’t be too keen on a bunch of teenagers getting smashed.

Sooo we’d have to do it privately.

“Nice bouquet,” I heard one of them—probably West—say.

“Don’t do it,” Caleb said.

“Do what?”

“Flip him off.” He nodded down at where I’d already started to lift my hand. “We’re still being filmed.”

“I think our parents would be more surprised if I *didn’t* flip someone off at least twice tonight.”

“You have a point, but…” He knocked my hand away, and I let out an exaggerated sigh.

“Fiiine. But if you think I’m behaving all night—”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Good. Because I think our friends back there might make a scene on the dance floor.”

“Let’s hope so.” When I raised a brow, he shrugged. “Someone’s gotta get these uptight richies to have a good time.”

I gasped. “Caleb Reeves. Are you encouraging debauchery?”

As we made it to the end of the aisle and into the foyer, he turned toward me, a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

“Looks like you’ve been rubbing off on me, McKinney.”

“WHAT THE HELL are you trying to do? The robot?” I screwed up my nose at the picture Caleb was making on the dance floor. At some point he’d lost his jacket and his tie, and several of the buttons on his shirt were undone.

“Isn’t it obvious?” he said, repeating whatever that move was, and I snorted out a laugh.

“You look like a ninety-year-old trying to put his jacket on.”

Caleb stopped moving and blew the brown waves that had escaped their slicked-back ’do off his forehead. “How else are you going to dance to this song?”

“You seriously calling that dancing?”

He laughed and pointed to my arms. “At least I don’t look like someone being electrocuted.”

“I’m freestyling.” My arms jolted in a wave from the tips of my left fingers across my shoulders to the right.

“That what they call it?”

I shoved Caleb in the arm, laughing. “Yeah, you should try it sometime.”

“I’d need some alcohol for that.”

“Did someone say alcohol?”

I swung around to see one of our good friends—or I should say *my* good friend, since Caleb couldn’t stand him—East, with a smirk plastered on his smug lips.

“Caleb.” I grinned at the way my new stepbrother was glaring at East’s interrupting. “But we both know he hasn’t got any.”

“I can fix that.”

“Yeah?”

“Of course.” The snobbish tone was pure East as his eyes flicked back to Caleb. “He needs all the help he can get.”

Caleb rolled his eyes and grabbed at my arm as East walked off the dance floor. “You’re not seriously going to get drunk tonight, are you?”

“Not drunk. Just a little happy. It’ll help loosen up the limbs. Plus, you know Mom and Dick don’t care if we have the occasional drink now and then.”

Caleb scanned the room, his conscience much louder than mine. But before he could think too hard about it, I grabbed his hand and tugged him off the dance floor.

“Come on, it’ll be fun.”

“Okay, but just one.”

“Yes, Dad.”

We laughed as we followed after East, weaving our way through the crowded tables and behind one of the huge pillars to where the doors opened out into a side hall. That was where we found the rest of our crew waiting on us.

There were six of us in total. Preston, who was Mr. Preppy, with his perfectly pressed tuxedo and straight-as-a-pin bow tie, whose father was a state Senator. Donovan, our resident pretty boy, who had a perfect face and smile and would probably end up being a famous model one day like his mom. Then there were the troublemakers, East and West, best friends from two of the richest families in Manhattan. The Eastons owned half the real estate in the city, and West's father was one of the biggest hotel magnates in the world.

Our parents were all part of New York's high society, and as their children we tended to get away with just about everything.

Including a few drinks at our parents' wedding.

The guy's faces lit up when they saw us, a couple of them coming over to clap us on the shoulders as West held up a bottle of Don Julio and waggled his brows.

"Ready to celebrate?"

"Shots?" Caleb groaned. "Oh God."

"You had to pick tequila," I said, shaking my head. "Don't you remember what happened the last time Caleb drank tequila?"

"Yeah, he had fun." West started laughing as he took a swig and passed the bottle to Preston.

"I can have fun without tequila," Caleb complained as the bottle made its way around to me.

"But would you have skinny-dipped in the Waldorf's *pool* without it?"

"Hey, we all swore not to talk about that ever again after West's dad erased the tape."

"*You* might've." East grinned. "But how do you know that was the only copy?"

Caleb narrowed his eyes, but before he could say anything, I shoved the bottle at him. "Drink up. If anything, it'll help you put up with him."

Caleb chuckled, his easygoing smile coming back full force as he brought the tequila to his lips and took a gulp, wincing as the fiery liquid made a path down his throat.

As the bottle made its way around the group a second time, everyone was joking a little more until it finally came back to me and Caleb.

That was when Donovan held up his hands for us to wait, then said, “To Vera and Richard *finally* tying the knot, and to the two of you, who will finally understand just how annoying it can be to have a brother.”

Caleb and I looked at each other and immediately laughed, because we’d been living with each other for years now, been best friends for all of them. This wedding would change nothing, and neither would the title.

Donovan was delusional. I couldn’t think of anyone I’d rather be stepbrothers with, and hell if we didn’t have a couple more drinks to celebrate that.

“OH NO YOU don’t.” Caleb grabbed the back of my untucked shirt as I attempted to climb the stairs that led up to my bedroom in our parents’ penthouse. “You’re veering a little too far to the right for that to be a safe choice right now.”

“Maybe it’s you with the wonky vision. I’m tobally—” The word felt wrong on my tongue. “Totomally. Shit.”

“*Totally* fine?” Caleb laughed. “Yeah, you sound like it.”

I kicked one dress shoe off and it went flying straight at his head, but his reflexes were quick and he ducked out of the way just in time.

“Dude. Trying to kill me already? I don’t think that’ll mean more in your trust.”

A snort-laugh escaped me. “Whoopsss.” I toed off the other one and added it to the pile before following Caleb into the family room. It wasn’t easy not to look at him when I was sober, let alone after tequila shots. I knew I shouldn’t, but hell, looking wasn’t hurting anyone, and it wasn’t like he knew.

The front tails of his shirt were pulled out, but the back was somehow still tucked in, showing off the curves of his ass in those tailored pants he should really wear more often. We were about the same height, but his build made his shoulders seem broader. He wasn’t a sporty kind of guy—me either, for that matter—but years of carrying his camera equipment and holding position for hours had given him powerful arms…and hands, but I wasn’t thinking about that. Much.

Ugh. It was his fault he was so good looking it was almost painful, but then he had to go and be the most kickass person I knew. When we’d first

met, I wanted to hate him, but then he flashed that easygoing smile and I figured…it wouldn't hurt to have a hot best friend.

Best friend and now *stepbrother*. It wasn't enough he had to be straight, now the universe was all, "Haha, fuck you, Travis, now you really can't have him."

So I looked, but I'd never touch.

His dress socks must've been as slippery on the marble floor as mine, so when he started sliding toward the couch like an ice skater, I realized he was onto something. Much easier and less likely to fall on my ass. At least one of us was thinking smart.

"I feel like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business*," he said, sliding sideways and almost knocking into the wall.

I shook my head. "Nah. You'd have to lose your pants first."

His forehead wrinkled, like he was replaying the scene in his mind, and then he chuckled. "Oh yeah."

Before I could ask, "Who's drunk now?" Caleb was undoing his pants and kicking them across the room.

What…the fuck?

All I could do was stand there staring and wonder if somehow I'd actually passed out and was dreaming this.

"Wh—what are you doing?" I said.

"Duh. I can't *Risky Business* in pants." To prove his point, he skated behind the wall and then slid sideways across the floor several feet. "Hah. Beat that."

Somehow through the haze of alcohol I snapped my focus back to Caleb's face and away from the fact that he was in his boxer briefs. "You want to challenge me? Are you sure?"

Caleb kicked his chin up. "I'm not scared of you."

"You should be."

"I'm not. Especially when you lose those."

Shit, he wanted me out of my pants too? Did he hear himself right now?

I wasn't about to complain, so I tore off my pants and tossed them up in the air with a flick of my wrist.

Tequila really did make Caleb fun.

"Just remember you asked for this," I said, sliding across the room to join him. My dick had already started to perk up a little watching Caleb's

hot ass, but at least the tails of my shirt hung low enough to cover it. Then again, I wasn't exactly shy about my sexuality. I liked sex, and a lot of it, and everyone knew I was weak for a gorgeous guy.

But this was Caleb. He didn't need to know I was packing a semi for him.

"I made it to here." He toed an imaginary line over the spot he'd landed before backing away to watch me.

"You're making it too easy," I taunted him, moving behind the wall and readying myself.

"One, two—"

I propelled myself before he hit three, gliding several feet before shit turned sideways and I stacked it. My arms windmilled as I tried to catch myself, but I slammed into Caleb anyway, knocking him on his ass.

We tumbled down on top of Mom's Persian rug—the one that cost more than most houses—and laughed like two lunatics, the alcohol dulling the pain we'd no doubt feel tomorrow as we rolled to our backs.

"Idiot." Caleb shoved me in the shoulder. "You were supposed to wait till I counted to three."

"'Cause that would've stopped me from running into your ass."

"Well, you didn't run into my *ass*. Let's not get carried away."

If only my cock would get that message. But with us flat on our backs now, arms and legs touching, it was nearly exploding in excitement. I needed to think about something else, *anything* else, other than the fact that Caleb was lying beside me in nothing more than a shirt and boxer briefs.

"You think we'll still do stupid shit like this when we go away to college?"

Caleb snorted. "Random much?"

It was, but I needed to get my mind off him and onto something other than his dick. So college it was.

"Just answer the question."

"Will we slide around our apartment like Tom Cruise?"

I turned my head to look at him, a grin on my face. "*Our* apartment?"

"Well, yeah, we're gonna be roomies, right? Parents said they'd pay for a place."

They had said that, but I wasn't sure Caleb would be down for it, considering the way I planned to run wild once we were free. He was a

quieter soul than I was—except when he drank tequila—but if he would have me, then I planned to take him up on the offer.

"Duh." I looked ahead, out the floor-to-ceiling windows that had a stunning view of Central Park. "You think it'll be some place like this?"

"A *penthouse*?"

I looked back to see Caleb's wide eyes. "I mean, maybe not a penthouse, but Mom and Dick aren't gonna make us stay in the dorms."

A low chuckle that made my stomach flip and my cock throb vibrated out of Caleb.

"You're such a snob."

"Am not."

Caleb raised a brow, then did his best imitation of me. "*Mom and Dick won't make us stay at a dorm.*… Do you know how many people would kill to get a room at Astor?"

"Yeah." I screwed my nose up. "But we're not just people."

"See, you're a snob."

I rolled to my side and propped my head up on my hand. "It's not snobbish, it's realistic. You just don't like to admit it."

"Shut up. I'm not a snob."

"I'm sorry," I said, looking around the enormous room. "Do you not live here? In a penthouse on Park Avenue?"

"You know what I mean." Caleb turned to look up at me, and Jesus, his face was so close to mine in this position. His eyes tracked over my features as though he were searching my expression to make sure I understood what he was telling me. But I was too blinded by how fucking gorgeous he was to get the message.

"I don't belong here," he continued, no doubt meaning the penthouse, but if he knew where my brain had detoured, he'd definitely be talking about lying so close to me.

His stepbrother. Who was hard as a steel pipe for him.

"I always saw myself more in Soho or Chelsea, you know, the arty areas."

"Right." I blinked, trying to get my brain to focus on something other than how full his lips were and the way he kept licking them. "I could see that."

"Yeah?"

"Sure."

“Would you ever think about living there?”

“In Soho?”

“Yes.” Caleb started to laugh. “With me. Are you even listening to me?”

“I am, but…”

He cocked his head to the side, his grin widening. “The tequila’s caught up to you, hasn’t it?”

“Maybe.” My voice was quiet as I ran my gaze over the flush of his cheeks and where it trailed down his neck into the collar of his shirt.

“Travis?”

“Huh?”

“You okay?”

No, I fucking wasn’t. I was about two seconds away from doing something really stupid, but before I could move away, Caleb reached up and put a hand to my forehead, and I froze.

Fuck.

“You’re burning up.”

Yeah, for you.… The words were on the tip of my tongue, dying to roll off, but then he trailed his fingers down to my cheek.

“Do you feel okay? Do you think you had too much to drink?”

I *knew* I’d had too much to drink, because the thoughts swirling through my head were ones I’d been squashing for months, and now they were taking control—of my mind, body, and dick.

Words got stuck in my throat as I reached up, planning on pushing his hand away because his fingers were still on my face. Once I had a hold of his wrist, though, I couldn’t let go. His pulse was steady beneath my thumb, but the longer I stared up at him and he stared back, the faster it seemed to get.

Maybe it was my imagination. Maybe it was the deep, dark hope I kept tucked away that was somehow creeping out now. But there was no denying the way the crease between his brows eased, his worry over my wellbeing subtly changing into something I’d never seen in his expression before.

As his dark brown eyes searched mine, I struggled to breathe, but not too deep, or else I’d move and the bubble would burst.

Caleb wasn’t moving either. He was so still. Was he waiting for something? Why was he looking at me like that? He had to stop. But if he looked away, he’d notice that my dick was making my reaction obvious.

“Travis?” His voice was barely a whisper, but he was so close that his breath warmed my lips.

Without thinking, I licked along my lower one, like I could taste some part of him that way, and his eyes dropped to the move.

And didn’t look away.

Oh God. He was seriously testing my self-control right now. It wouldn’t have mattered if I was stone-cold sober—the fact that I could feel his cock jerk against my hip meant he was turned on, and I was the one making that happen.

When his eyes met mine again, his pupils blown and heavy with what I could only read as desire, I slammed the door on every rational thought, every voice in my head screaming at me not to take this further.

Still holding his wrist, I inched it down slowly so that his fingers trailed over the curve of my jaw and down my neck. I didn’t take my eyes off him, watching for any small movement, any change to indicate I was taking this too far.

The second I moved his palm onto my chest, I knew he had to feel the way my heart was beating so fast and hard I thought I might pass out.

Don’t do it. Don’t make a move. You can’t. It’ll ruin everything.

I thought I’d locked the door on all the logical thoughts smacking me upside the head, but they were back and they were making sense now. This was a terrible idea, even though nothing felt more perfect than our hands on each other.

As luck would have it, just as I started to pull away, a lock of brown hair fell across Caleb’s forehead, blocking his eyes from mine. Instinctively, I reached up, threading my fingers through it and pushing it back from his gorgeous face so I could see all of him.

Caleb sucked in a breath, and I froze for all of two seconds before I tightened my grip in his hair and lifted myself up to close the distance between our mouths.

And then…I kissed him.

Lips, soft and full, just as I’d always imagined them, pressed against mine in a way I’d only ever fantasized about. But in every one of those daydreams they’d quickly been snatched away from me. Not this time, though, and that’s how knew it was different. That it was real.

Caleb’s lips parted under mine, a soft gasp of surprise at first that soon changed to a groan of pleasure as his fingers curled around my shirt. I had

no idea how long this would last, so like a thief trespassing, I boldly stole what I could before I was caught and hauled away.

I slipped my tongue inside his mouth, tasting the tequila we'd drunk *way* too much of tonight, and Caleb thrust his hips forward, his erection coming into direct contact with mine.

A strangled sound escaped me, the pleasure and pain of finally having him so close almost too much to stand, as I scooted even closer, widening my legs for him to slip his in between.

What the hell was happening right now?

I knew it was real—I could feel it in every beat of my heart, every throb of my dick. But this was *Caleb*.

Caleb kissing me.

Caleb touching me.

Caleb rubbing his cock up against me.

"Caleb…" I tore my lips from his, the blood ringing in my ears making it difficult to think as I trailed my fingers down his cheek to his mouth, touching his swollen lips. Lips swollen from mine. I couldn't believe it. I'd waited so long for this moment, years. And now here it was. Here *he* was. Looking at me like he wanted me to do it all again.

So I did.

I crushed our lips together, his groan becoming my own as I trailed my hands down his dress shirt, memorizing the feel of his body. My fingers found the final button, and I slipped it free. When he didn't stop me or pull away, I unbuttoned a few more.

I needed to touch his skin. I needed to feel it beneath my hands. I brushed my fingers down the trail of hair leading into his boxer briefs, and Caleb's hips jutted up against mine. The blood rushing around my head seemed to drown out all common sense as I slipped my fingers under the waistband of his briefs and teased the warm skin there.

Would he tell me to stop now? I kept waiting for him to grab my hand and put an end to it all. What was happening was too good to be true. But when he took hold of my face and licked deeper into my mouth, I didn't hold back.

The second I slid my fingers down over his cock and felt how long, thick, and hard he was, there was no way I was letting him go without seeing him come. I wrapped my hand around him, giving a nice, slow pull, and his moan into my mouth was pure sex.

The sound spurred me on, somehow ramping up my need. His briefs were too constricting at this angle, and I shoved them down, freeing his erection. I ripped my mouth away to look at him, at the flush of his dick and the way his plump head glistened.

God, he was so fucking hot, even better than all the fantasies I'd had over the years.

I dove back into his waiting mouth and pushed my own boxer briefs down before taking him back in my hand. His pre-cum made it a slick slide that had him gasping against my lips and sucking on my tongue.

Hell fucking yes. Had anything ever felt this good? The answer to that was a resounding no, as it played on repeat in time with my own throbbing cock. I wanted to make this last forever, to linger over every sound, touch, and movement he made, but the likelihood of that happening was about as thin as the boxer briefs I'd just shoved off us both.

We were too young, too horny, and too fucking turned on to draw this out, and I needed to rub up on him something fierce.

I loosened my grip just enough that I could take hold of the both of us, and as soon as my hard length came into contact with his, he trembled.

We were so close now, my pre-cum mixing with his and making a sticky mess between the two of us, but none of that mattered. We were connected from head to toe in a tangle of tongues, cocks, and legs.

He hooked a leg over the top of mine and pulled me in close, needing the friction, craving it now that his body was seconds away from detonation. I tightened my hand, increasing the pressure as we pushed through the hole I'd made just for us.

"Caleb…" I panted, his name the only word that had been spoken between us since this started. But his gasps and heavy breathing were all I needed to know that he was right there with me. That we were about to jump off this cliff together, and damn the consequences.

My strokes became more frenzied then, my fist pumping up and down our lengths like a piston as he jammed his dick up against mine. I could feel my climax threatening now, could hear that Caleb's was too, and several rough strokes later his body stiffened and his cock jerked against mine. Then he ripped his mouth from my lips and shouted my name, and the sound of it in that raspy, guttural tone, the hot, pulsing jets of his cum on my hand, had my orgasm slamming into me.

I squeezed my hand and eyes shut and exploded in a torrent all over him, and as I milked every last drop from the two of us, I'd never felt happier in my entire life.

A wave of immense satisfaction crashed over me as my breathing slowed and my dick calmed. I released the two of us and opened my eyes, wanting to see the gorgeous guy I'd *finally* been given permission to kiss.

Caleb blinked his beautiful eyes at me as though seeing me for the first time as I unclenched his fingers from my shirt and began to draw it down my body. I wanted him to know that I was with him, feeling all the things he was. But the second his hand bumped into my erection, bumped into his *own*, there was a flash of…horror in his eyes.

The next thing I knew, he snatched his hand back, and moved to his feet, glaring down at me.

"Caleb—" My words halted as he took a step back, shaking his head, reaching for his shirt tails and pulling them over himself as though they would somehow erase the evidence behind them. But it was too late. I'd already memorized it.

His eyes flew to my spent dick, and as the realization of what he'd—*we'd*—just done began to sink in, he started to back away, almost tripping over the coffee table behind him.

I knew I needed to say something, needed to reassure him that everything was okay, this didn't have to change anything. But before I could get another word out, he turned on his heel and bolted from the room.

Fuck. *Fuuuck.*

I was such an idiot. Such a goddamn fool to let this happen. I'd known Caleb didn't feel that way about me, and still I'd pushed. What had I been hoping for? That one orgasm from me and he'd suddenly realize I was what he wanted? He was straight, for fuck's sake, and he'd never given any indication otherwise—

Bang.

The sound of a door slamming somewhere in the penthouse jolted me up off my ass, and I grabbed up my pants, shoving my legs into each side. There was no way I was waiting around for a post-game showdown. It was clear any and all fun we'd been having tonight was now over.

Caleb didn't want this.

Didn't want me.

He’d made that pretty obvious by his disappearing act, and I wasn’t about to go up to bed in the room next to his and lie there all night thinking about the look of disgust I’d just seen in his eyes. No way.

I stepped out into the hall and looked up the stairs to where our rooms were located. The silence was so loud it was almost deafening as I grabbed my keys and wallet and headed for the front door.

I needed to get out of there, needed space to breathe. It felt as though my world had just imploded on itself. In the blink of an eye I’d gone from gaining a stepbrother to losing my best friend, and I didn’t know how to take back what I’d just done.

He’d never look at me the same way. *We’d* never be the same again.

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TWO

travis

Present Day

THE SECOND I stepped off the elevator and felt the bass pounding beneath my Alexander McQueen punk boots, I had a feeling tonight would be epic.

Epically good? Epically bad? It was too soon to tell, but the throng of sexy twentysomethings outside my friends' condo was promising.

"Jesus, they really should've moved this thing to a bigger venue," Preston, my roommate and fellow Park Avenue Prince, said as we moved through the crowd like a hot knife through butter.

"And deny us the opportunity to get up close and personal with a few hundred willing bodies?" I winked at an attractive blond as I slid past, and he started to smile before the taller one behind him wrapped an arm around his waist and glared in my direction. I smirked and leaned in toward Preston. "Fifty bucks says that guy loses his bodyguard by the end of the night."

Preston glanced back at them and shook his head. "And ends up in your bed instead? I'm not taking that bet."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not an idiot, that's why."

"You're no fun." I pretended to pout as we reached the door, where I caught the eye of a lean, shorter freshman type. "What about that one?"

"Too easy."

"That's the point."

Preston rolled his eyes and walked his preppy ass inside, where the blare of the music ensured there'd be a lot of lip reading tonight.

Exactly what I was hoping for.

East and West's place was the same layout as the one I shared with Preston, but they'd had the staff at the Waldorf Towers remove all their furniture to squeeze in as many people in as possible. That was something I'd never complain about, especially with more than half of them bumping and grinding as we made our way to the bar. The energy in the room was intoxicating, sexual, and the high of admiring eyes watching me was better than any drug.

At least, it was tonight.

"There he is." West slung his arm around my shoulders and pulled me into his side. "Told you he'd come."

My eyes caught on West's boyfriend JT.

"I'm sorry? Was that in doubt? Don't you know by now, JT, I always come." I winked. "Especially at a party."

JT shrugged as he took West's hand. "You're late, which is unlike you, and I wasn't sure, considering I invited Caleb—"

"The bar's open, right? Why am I standing here empty-handed?"

JT shook his head at my obvious interruption, but like the smart guy he was, he let it go as I moved away from the two lovebirds, eager to get this party started. Something that wouldn't happen if I had to stand there and hear about a certain someone who'd been invited tonight *against* my wishes.

I wasn't a *total* asshole. I got that it hardly seemed fair to invite the entire student body of Astor minus one. However, *he* would've understood his exclusion from the list, and if he didn't, that was his problem.

Caleb Reeves was the bane of my existence, and from the moment he'd stepped into my orbit, fate had decided to turn on me. It hated me. I was sure of it. It constantly messed with my life. Something that had been crystal clear when West's boyfriend went and befriended my arch-nemesis, the same person he'd gone and invited tonight despite my many protests.

Alcohol was a must. Especially if I was going to be in the same vicinity as Caleb. East better have tracked down some—

"Your special 'green juice,' my friend." A tumbler full of bright green liquid was dangled in front of my face as East stepped into my path. "Not one leaf of kale or stem of celery in sight."

“Thank God for you.”

“Many have, and will continue to. You look like someone who needs a drink.”

“Really? I was hoping I looked like someone who needs a fuck.”

East arched a haughty brow, running his critical eye over my outfit. “You never look like you *need* one. You know that. More like someone who would give a good one.”

“That a request?”

“No. I don’t stick my dick in friends, sorry.”

“And here I thought *I* was the one giving.”

East waved me away with a flick of his hand. “Go work that tongue on someone receptive. You have a whole smorgasbord to choose from tonight.”

I scanned the crowd that filled the living room, searching out someone to pass the time with, and my eyes skidded to a stop on a hot guy shaking his ass on the dance floor in tight leather pants and a cropped shirt. He was having a good time, that was for sure, but when his gaze locked on mine, I knew I could make it a *great* fucking time.

Another sip of my drink and I made my way through the crowd as West wolf-whistled behind me. He was always the quickest to encourage my wicked ways—one of the reasons I kept him around.

Colored lights flashed throughout the darkened room, lighting bodies up in shades of blues, purples, reds. With the Manhattan skyline as the backdrop, the whole scene was decadent and just the right side of sinful.

And what do you know, I didn't have to search out that hot body on the dance floor, because he found me first.

“Looking for me?” he said, hooking his fingers in my waistband without bothering with introductions.

That was fine by me. I didn’t need to know his name. I only needed the lust for me in his eyes.

I rolled my hips, nice and slow, and he licked his lips. Then he wrapped an arm around my neck and joined in, matching my pace as I sipped on the absinthe East had special-ordered for me. I could already feel its effects making their way through my veins, giving me that intense buzz I craved.

This was what I’d been after—a distraction. A sexy body to fill my mind and hands with. A quick and easy way to forget that somewhere in this apartment was the reason I chose a drink that had hallucinogenic effects.

Too bad it hadn’t set in yet, as my eyes latched on to a familiar figure through the gyrating masses.

Caleb stood off to the side of the dancers, no doubt trying to melt into the shadows. But dressed in his run-of-the-mill jeans and button-up shirt, he stood out like a sore thumb amongst this crowd. Not to mention the head of casually messy strands that he somehow made hot just by running his fingers through it. He looked like he belonged in some arty jazz café over in Soho—his side of town—not standing in a fancy-ass penthouse that overlooked Park Avenue.

Why was he even here? Why had he said yes to JT’s invite? He’d done the same thing last year, but I’d figured it was to keep an eye on the “new kid.” He had no goddamn excuse this time around, unless…

Caleb’s gaze shifted to the eager guy rubbing against me, and my pulse began to pound a little faster until his lips twisted in disdain.

How fucking predictable. If there was one thing I could always count on when it came to Caleb, it was a healthy dose of judgment. Well, might as well give him something to really get up his ass.

As my dance partner ground up against me, I ran my hand down his back and over the curve of his ass before giving it a squeeze. Then I winked at Caleb.

His reaction was what I expected—he rolled his eyes and shook his head before turning away from me.

This was what I did. Provoked a response any time he was around.

You’d think by now I’d stop caring enough to bother, but I could admit to myself I was petty enough to want a reaction any way I could get it, as fucked as that was.

I took another long swallow of absinthe and turned my partner around so that my cock nestled in between his ass cheeks. It wasn’t because I didn’t want him to see the way I looked around the room to see where Caleb had gone.

I definitely didn’t notice the way Caleb had attracted a group of eager women. Or that he zeroed in on the only blonde in the group, giving her all his attention.

I wasn’t feeling anything at all about that.

As I downed the rest of my drink, I saw East in my periphery hopping onto the bar. He let out a piercing whistle, and the DJ cut the music, causing many in the crowd to groan, including my dance partner. Without the

pulsating beats that had sent me into the crowd, I found myself backing away and moving toward the bar.

“Quiet, fuckers, I’m speaking,” East said, towering over everyone from where he stood on the bar. The martini he held in one hand threatened to spill with every small movement, and a couple standing under him got the hell out of the way. “Congratulations on being invited to our annual ‘Welcome back to Astor’ party. We don’t let just any of the riffraff enter our sacred space, do we, West?”

West shook his head by the bar, his arm thrown around JT’s shoulders. Usually he would’ve joined East up there, but apparently his hip was glued to his boyfriend’s.

It made me want to gag. Everyone was hooking up, being monogamous, keeping secrets… What the hell ever happened to having a good time? At least East wasn’t the type to settle down. Like he’d ever find anyone he didn’t think was beneath him.

My eyes caught on Caleb leaning in close to the blonde, and I couldn’t tell if he was whispering sweet nothings or kissing his way up her neck.

Seriously? He came to this party just to find someone to fuck?

My jaw clenched so tight I could’ve spit molars, and I shoved my empty glass at West.

“Excuse me,” he said, holding it away from him. “I’m not your maid—Wait, what are you doing?”

I moved a couple of liquor bottles out of my way, planted my hands on the bar, and pushed myself up on top of it with relative ease, considering I was feeling a little tipsy already. East definitely hadn’t diluted that absinthe enough, but I didn’t care.

East smirked as I joined him. “It’s not time for the stripper portion of the night.”

Normally, that comment would entice me to do just that—take off my clothes, give a little show. But I couldn’t shove my irritation aside enough to play like that.

Instead, I tried and failed not to stare in Caleb’s direction as I took my place beside East. “You mind?”

East’s lips curled as though he could see inside my brain and was aware of the shitstorm brewing there, and like the instigator he was, he gestured for me to take the floor.

I cleared my throat, making a big to-do about it, and when Caleb didn't even look up—rude—I decided to get his attention another way.

"Okay, here goes. Cheers to you, cheers to me." I leveled my gaze on the back of Caleb's head. "And cheers to Caleb, or whoever he's pretending to be."

As Caleb's back stiffened, a rush of satisfaction flooded my body. He slowly turned in my direction, and whatever he'd been feeling seconds ago had turned to pure rage.

There, now *I've got your attention.*

"Travis, cut it out," JT hissed from in front of the bar, reaching for my hand, but East batted it away with his foot.

"Leave him alone, Golden Boy. He clearly has something to say."

Yeah, that's right. I *did* have something to say. If I could just remember what it was…

I swayed a little on the bar top, trying to think of where I'd been going with this, when Caleb's blonde ran a hand down his chest in an effort to regain his attention.

Would you look at that? It was all on me. *Now, where was I?*

Oh yeah…

"Cheers to you and cheers to me, and cheers to Caleb, or whoever he's pretending to be. Because a gentleman who prefers blondes is the *biggest* fallacy—"

"Did he seriously just say fallacy?" I heard someone say, but I was on a roll now.

"—when what he really wants is someone just like m—"

Oompfh.

A hand on my ass shoved me, and I stumbled down into the crowd before I could complete my final thought. One look at Caleb told me he'd caught the message, because his head looked like it was about to explode, and he flipped me off and stormed toward the door.

I mean, I couldn't blame him, even if this was what I'd considered my best work to date.

But that didn't mean I was going to let him run away. I wasn't done with him yet.

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THREE

caleb

HONEST TO GOD, I had to be a masochist at this point. That was the only explanation for why I kept showing up at places I knew the Park Avenue Princes would be.

Well, where one prince in particular would be.

The only excuse I had was that one of my closest friends dated one of those fuckers, and I hated to leave JT out there alone to fend off the wolves. I hadn't even gotten a chance to shoot him more than a quick wave before Travis decided to show his ass and taunt me in front of everyone.

It didn't matter where we were or how much I tried to defuse the situation by ignoring him. He'd always find me, and shit was never pretty.

I ran a frustrated hand through my hair as I stormed out of the condo and had to push through the masses waiting to get inside. I wanted to warn them off, but that would be a waste of breath. Everyone fucking *loved* the Park Avenue Pricks for some reason, even after all the stupid shit they'd pulled over the years. Even though no one would ever get close enough because they never let anyone in unless they were fucking you.

I stopped abruptly in front of the elevators, realizing the illustrious Waldorf Towers residences didn't believe in anything as trivial as a normal button panel to push. There wasn't anything at all except a hidden scanner residents could use, so how the hell was I supposed to get out of there? I wasn't about to trek down the forty-four floors to the lobby.

An older man appeared out of nowhere, the pin on his lapel signifying he was part of the staff here at the Towers. "Going down?"

“Please.” It didn’t escape my notice that I was the only one leaving, because the party was just getting started. I just didn’t care to waste my time or energy somewhere I wasn’t wanted, and JT would have to understand.

Fucking Travis…

He didn’t have to be drunk to be an asshole, but it made him even mouthier than usual. Apparently he got off on causing a scene.

“…Cheers to Caleb, or whoever he’s pretending to be…”

Was he serious with that shit? I wasn’t the one who instigated a fight at every turn.

As soon as the elevator opened, I rushed inside, only to hear someone call out my name. The second I turned around, I realized it was a mistake, because of course it was Travis who slapped his hand against the closing door and pushed it back.

His gunmetal-grey button-up rose a little with the move, showing off a strip of tanned skin just above his low-slung dark jeans. One of his flared bell sleeves dropped down his arm, revealing the multitude of rings adorning his fingers and the leather cuffs wrapped around his wrist. Tension radiated off him in waves, and I cursed at the confrontation I couldn’t seem to avoid.

“Going somewhere?” The ice in his voice matched the blue of his kohl-lined eyes as they narrowed dangerously on mine.

“Do us both a favor and go back to your party.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“No. Was I that obvious?”

Travis cocked his head to the side, the alcohol he’d downed evident in the crooked smirk that crept over his full lips. The tension from seconds ago morphed into his preferred ammo when he got someone alone. *Sex*.

He was like this with everyone—it wasn’t like I was special. I was, however, the only one who didn’t succumb to his charms.

“Pity you can’t be that obvious about *other* things you’d like.”

“I’m not doing this with you.” I moved to shove him out of the elevator, but he stepped inside and the door slid shut behind him.

“Oops.”

“Oops my ass.”

“Well, we could play that game too if you want to turn around and unzip.”

I grinded my back molars together and did my level best to glare him to death. Unfortunately, the asshole remained upright.

“You’re so fucking obnoxious, anyone ever tell you that?”

“Other than you?” Travis scrunched up his nose. “Nope. Most people lean toward hot, sexy, good in bed.”

“Only good, huh? That must be a blow to your ego.” The second the words were out of my mouth I realized my mistake, because if I’d learned anything over the years of verbal sparring with Travis, it was that I was never going to come out on top.

“Usually it’s something else getting blown besides my ego. But if you’d like an up close and personal demonstration of just how *good* I can be, all you have to do is get down on your knees.”

I shouldn’t have been shocked by the words. Travis was all about being as outrageous as possible. The audacity behind these words, though? The arrogance? He was fucking delusional.

“You wish.”

Travis crossed the car to stop opposite me, his eyes holding mine steady as he fired right back, “Yeah, well, at least I admit it.”

Not about to play his little game, I refused to back down. “Why do you always do this?”

“Call you out on your shit?”

“Draw attention to me?” I angled my chin up, not about to let him think for a second I was intimidated by him the way others were around the Park Avenue Dicks. “You hate me so much and don’t want me around, yet the second I am, you’re all about fucking with me.”

Travis’s lips curled. “Nice choice of words. Accident or on purpose?”

“This might come as a newsflash to you, but not everyone who talks to you wants to fuck you.”

“See, there you go again with the whole ‘everyone’ spiel. I’m asking about you, Caleb.” Travis leaned in a fraction, making me immediately rear back. “Do you wanna fuck me?”

God, he was such a prick. He always pushed at me. When it was around others, it was shit talking. He had to show how pissed he was at me and make sure all his friends knew that I was the enemy, that I had been since the night of our parents’ wedding. But when we were alone like this, when it was just me and him, the anger and frustration came out in a whole different way.

“What? No response?”

“I want to fucking punch you. Does that count?”

“In some circles, maybe.” Travis chuckled. “But I’m not into that.”

“Yeah, you’re more about the verbal punches, right?”

“If you don’t like it, why do you keep showing up?”

My eyes widened a fraction. “*Keep* showing up? Where else have I been?”

“Daire’s MMA thing—”

“Months ago.”

“The pop-up band event at Astor—”

“Even longer ago, *and* a school event. You’re reaching.”

“And you’re everywhere sucking some blonde chick’s face.” Travis moved in beside me then, and though I could feel the warmth of his body penetrating the sleeve of my shirt, I refused to move. “Interesting choice, by the way. Blonde…”

I turned until our faces were mere inches from each other and couldn’t help but notice how thick his dark lashes were around his icy eyes. He probably put makeup on those too, knowing him.

“I like blondes.”

“No you don’t.”

“And how the fuck would you know that?”

“Let’s call it…intuition.”

I rolled my eyes and willed us to hit the lobby so I could get the fuck out and away from him.

“Nothing to say?” Travis pushed, and while there was a whole lot I *could* say, I opted for silence. Nothing good ever came from these interactions, and the more I said, the more he’d use as ammunition the next time we came into contact.

He was still so close that I could smell his cologne and the alcohol on his breath. I needed him to get away from me. But I knew if I touched him, he’d only take that as an invitation to touch *me*.

I closed my eyes to block him out and focused on the fact that I’d be out of here in a few more seconds—

The elevator jolted to a stop suddenly and my eyes flew open.

“What the—”

Travis smirked as he moved his hand away from the only button in the whole car—the emergency stop button.

“Really?” I said, feeling my pulse kick up. “Very mature.”

“It was an accident.”

“Then key in whatever code it is that makes this thing start again.”

“Good idea.” He moved his hand to the wall beside my head, caging me in, and I stiffened. “Too bad I didn’t bring my phone with me. Damn.”

“You need to move.”

“Ask nicely.”

“Fucking *move*.”

Travis chuckled, a deep, throaty sound that wasn’t at all intimidated by what I might do. “See, the thing is, I don’t think you want me to. Not really.”

Before I could stop myself, I shoved against his chest, but he was somehow ready for it and grabbed my wrist to hold my hand there.

“Can I ask you something?” He leaned in, so close his nose brushed my ear. “What is it you’re afraid of?”

A shiver rolled through me, and I tried to convince myself it wasn’t from the way his breath tickled my neck.

“I’m not afraid. I’m annoyed.”

Travis slid his leg in between mine and groaned. “Annoyed? Really? Is that what’s causing the hard-on in your jeans?”

As the elevator began to move again—thank fuck—I pushed against him, forcing him away from my neck.

He searched my face, and a smile slowly curved his lips. “Oh, I remember. You don’t want to have a hard-on for your brother.”

“*Step*brother,” I said through clenched teeth.

“Family just the same.” He punctuated that with a wink that I wanted to slap off his face. Just because he had a hard-on for fucking *everyone* didn’t mean he needed to include me in that group.

With my hand curled into his shirt, I shoved him off me with more force than he’d obviously been expecting, because he lost his hold on me and stumbled back.

If the elevator doors hadn’t opened right then, I had no doubt he would’ve thought this whole thing was foreplay, but it wasn’t, and I’d had enough.

“Get the hell out of my way,” I growled, and when he didn’t move, I clipped him in the shoulder with mine.

His chuckle grated my nerves as I sped through the lobby, and just before I walked out, I heard him say, “See you at family dinner.”

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FOUR

travis

"UGH. WEREN'T WE just here?" Beside me, Gavin groaned as the door of our chauffeured Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van was pulled wide in front of the gates of Astor University. It was the first day back after a far-too-short summer, and none of us were jumping eagerly out to get the new school year started.

West was the first to get to his feet, though that probably had more to do with meeting up with JT, since he didn't ride with the rest of us. "All right," he said. "Move it or lose it."

"Time to terrorize the masses." Our resident grumpy bastard, Daire, lifted Gavin off his lap and stood up. With his all-black outfit, down to the leather jacket he always wore, he was a mass of muscles and tattoos and looked ready to do more than terrorize. With his fists, most likely.

"Calm down, muscle man—there's too many people around to tie someone up." I winked at him, and he scowled…although that was really just his face's default.

Gavin grabbed his boyfriend's hand and dragged Daire out of the Sprinter, leaving the rest of us to trail after. While I wasn't thrilled at another year of sitting through brain-numbing classes, I didn't mind the social aspect that came along with it.

The warm day wasn't exactly conducive to my outfit, a pair of dark bootcut pants and a steampunk military jacket that had my skin glistening already. Looking like a sex god was more important than comfort, though, and I had a reputation to uphold.

All eyes were on our group as we walked through the courtyard and into Astor's main entrance. While several of us thrived on the attention—like me, West, East, and even Donovan—the others would rather stay under the radar.

What a terrible existence *that* would be.

"Where you off to first?" Donovan said.

I scrolled through the schedule on my phone. "Looks like…Livingston. You?"

"Fucking King. Great." He shoved his cell in his pocket. "Wish me luck."

"At least you've got eye candy. I've got the man who hasn't changed his suit since the seventies."

"Yeah, and if King catches me checking him out, he'll castrate my ass."

"Well, not your *ass*." I glanced sideways at Donovan and laughed. "Just ogle him when he turns around. The guy fills out those tailored pants like…" I kissed my fingers.

"So not worth the risk." Donovan shook his head. "Catch you after."

As he disappeared into his lecture hall, I headed to mine. It was about half full, and after choosing a seat near the back, I threw my bag into the chair beside me. This was one of the final requisite classes I needed before narrowing down a major, something my stepdad reminded me of every time I saw him. He thought I needed to have direction in my life; I thought he needed a stylist and a few joints to loosen up.

While the seats around me began to fill, I flipped open my sketchbook and picked up where I'd left off on the flared sleeve jacket I was designing. I was trying to decide between pointed shoulder pads or a boxy look, something to accentuate the silhouette. This class was pointless when all I was interested in was making myself, and others, look spectacular.

When Professor Livingston's monotone voice echoed through the hall with the usual introduction every professor on campus made, I prepared myself for a boring hour. Then one of the doors flew open and Caleb stepped inside.

I did a double take, wondering what the hell he was doing and why he looked so out of breath. He scanned the room, and it took me a few seconds too long to realize he was looking for a seat and there wasn't an empty spot anywhere.

But then his eyes landed on me, surprise flickering before he glanced down at my bag in the chair beside me.

No. Fuck no.

"Young man?" Professor Livingston's voice boomed suddenly as his mic was finally turned on. "You need to find a seat. Now."

Caleb swallowed and looked around the room again, like he was searching for anywhere else he could possibly go. He closed his eyes briefly and took in a deep breath. When he opened them again, he moved quickly—

—to my row.

"Don't say a word," he muttered as he tossed my bag on the ground by my feet and dropped into the seat beside me.

"Rude much?" I slapped my sketchbook shut and leaned down to grab my laptop out from its zipped pouch, flipping it over to check it wasn't dented anywhere.

Caleb sank into his chair and rested his head on his fist, as if that was enough to block me out. We were so close it wouldn't take much to brush my leg against his…

Which would be a phenomenally bad idea.

"So, why you running late?" I glanced at his wind-swept hair and smirked. "Couldn't find your beanie?"

Caleb's eyes narrowed, but that was the only outward sign that he heard me as he did everything in his power not to look my way.

"I figured you'd have a whole collection by now. Saves trying to have any style."

"As opposed to your trying too hard."

"Is that what I'm doing?" I glanced down at today's outfit and the black nails I'd added last night. "Here I thought I was doing the world a favor. You know, by looking this good."

"Do you have an off switch?"

"I do. It's right by the switch to turn me on. You remember where that is, right?"

That got his attention. Caleb whipped his head in my direction, his jaw bunched. "Shut. Up."

"Or else what?"

"Excuse me?" Professor Livingston said. "Is there a problem back there?"

I arched a taunting brow, and Caleb looked to the front of the room, shaking his head.

“Good,” Livingston said. “In that case you won’t mind waiting until after class to finish your conversation.”

“Or when hell freezes over,” Caleb mumbled as he began to drum his fingers on the table by his laptop. I decided to give him a reprieve as he settled in to listen to Livingston drone on about the semester’s syllabus.

I tuned out entirely. I didn’t care one way or another about what we’d be learning in here, and it wouldn’t have mattered if I did. All I could seem to concentrate on was the tense body beside mine, the way Caleb’s arm and shoulder brushed against me whenever he shifted in his seat. A fact he clearly noticed too, because every time his shoulder came into contact with mine, he cursed.

I leaned my head in close to his and said in a whisper, “Could you maybe stop rubbing up on me? It’s very distracting.”

“Rubbing up— I’m *not* rubbing up on you. The chairs are too close.”

“Yeah, but you’re squirming in yours.”

“I am not. And did it ever occur to you that maybe I’m trying to get away from you?”

I feigned a pout. “Now why would you want to do that?”

Caleb’s eyes trailed over my face as though he were searching for something—don’t ask me what. “Maybe because you sprayed half a bottle of cologne on this morning.”

“Not half a bottle, no. Just a spray in all the places that get hot enough to make the scent permeate. I’m glad you noticed.”

“Pretty hard not to when it’s giving me a headache.”

“I know a good way to relieve that. Just move your arm so I can reach under the desk.”

“Try it and die.”

I shrugged and turned back to face the front of the room. “Your loss.”

Caleb mumbled something I didn’t quite catch, and while I told myself I didn’t care what he’d said, that familiar feeling of self-doubt and humiliation tried to creep its way back in, just like it always did around Caleb.

It was annoying that, even after all these years, he still had this power over me. It didn’t matter how many people I’d been with, or that I could

just look at someone and get them between the sheets—the complete and utter contempt Caleb felt toward me would always trump everything else.

And make me feel fucking worthless.

But I refused to let him see that. Would *never* let him see that again. I'd let him in, lowered all my defenses, and what had I gotten for it? The cold, hard slap of rejection—something I'd promised myself I would never let anyone make me feel me again, especially Caleb fucking Reeves.

Which explained why I was the way I was with him.

We both knew the truth. Had for years now. But instead of admitting it and taking what was right there in front of us, Caleb had bottled that shit up tight. He'd stuffed the genie back in the bottle and then danced around it with all the harem girls.

Well, all the blonde ones, anyway.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, saving me from the self-destructive path I was heading down. The last thing I needed was to get so caught up in the past that I forgot who was sitting beside me. I couldn't let Caleb see the effect he still had on me. I couldn't allow him that kind of control. All he needed to know was that the night he walked away from me was the night he walked away from the best thing he never had.

I shifted so I could reach for my phone, and when Caleb looked down at my lap, I added an extra thrust for his benefit.

"Why don't you take a picture? I know you have your camera."

"Yeah, I'll pass."

I smirked and drew my phone out of my pocket. "I remember a time when you begged to take my picture."

"Begged?" Caleb snorted. "That's not how I remember it."

"No?" I leaned in until our shoulders touched. "I guess you tell everyone there's something *captivating* about their face."

Caleb shook his head. "I'm a photographer. I'm always looking for interesting angles and shapes, and your face is—"

"Captivating." I angled the face under discussion in his direction and Caleb's eyes narrowed. "Your words, not mine."

Caleb shoved me off his shoulder and back to my seat. "That was a long time ago."

"Not that long."

"Long enough. I don't know why you always have to bring it up."

Neither did I. One minute I was telling myself to avoid any trips down memory lane, then I looked at him and found myself right back where we started.

Fuck.

I opened my phone and saw several texts from the guys about their first classes, and then spotted a couple from the hot body I'd been dancing with at the party the other night.

There, that was what I needed to distract me. The possibility of a hookup. After the party I'd received several…*enticing* pictures from Kirby, and I knew he would've gone home with me that night if I'd invited him.

But after my impromptu cheers and the following argument with the infuriating man beside me, the best I'd been able to promise my dance partner was a call at a later date.

KIRBY:

Will be at Church later tonight. Think I might need to ask for some forgiveness. Do you feel like meeting me for confession?

I chuckled. Kirby wasn't heading to an actual church but an exclusive club where the last thing done in the confessional booths was asking for forgiveness.

"Latest conquest?" Caleb's eyes were on my screen.

"Why? Jealous?"

"No. Just wondering why he's texting, since you're more the one-and-done type."

For someone who loathed me as much as Caleb did, he sure seemed interested in where I put my dick. "*Because* I haven't done him yet, and he's definitely my type."

"But then bye-bye?"

I searched for the underlying sarcasm that was usually behind Caleb's words. But it wasn't there this time—he seemed genuinely curious. Why?

"What's it to you?"

"Nothing. I just wonder how you keep them all straight in your head."

I pulled up the photo Kirby had sent me that night and held it out to Caleb. "Trust me, there's nothing straight about him, and like you pointed out, I don't want to keep him, just fuck him."

“Why do you—”

“One final piece of information before we get started here today.” Professor Livingston’s voice cut off whatever verbal slap-back Caleb had been about to deliver. “I hope you like your seats, because that’s where you’ll be sitting all semester.”

Friends that had taken spots beside one another rejoiced, and I turned to see Caleb’s jaw practically in his lap.

One lecture had been bad enough, but now we were stuck sitting beside each other for the next *sixteen* weeks?

Great. This was just fucking great.

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FIVE

caleb

THIS WAS NOT going to work.

I'd known that the moment I got to class on Monday and found my fate tied to Travis's by way of my seating this semester. But five days later and I wanted to strangle that fuckhead.

Travis had always been good at zeroing in on someone's sore spot and twisting the knife. I'd just never expected that I'd be on the receiving end. I'd always been the one on the other side of him. The fun, outrageous side. But that was definitely not the case now, and hadn't been for years, and with me his unfortunate captive for fifty minutes every other day with nowhere to run, he was relentless with this little game of his.

And it was a game. The flirtation. The double innuendos. The seducer's charm he laid on thick whenever we were alone.

It was his way of fucking with me, because he sure as shit wasn't like that around his friends. Whenever they were around, I was nothing more than an annoyance to him, a bug on the bottom of his boot.

And I needed to get the hell away from him as quick as possible.

"Professor Livingston?" I called out as I jogged down the stairs toward the front podium. Travis had all but bolted from class—not that I'd expected anything else, considering it was Friday and he was probably as ready as I was to get this week over with. But it had offered the perfect opening for me to make my move.

When I reached the front of the class, Professor Livingston flicked the snaps of his briefcase closed and looked up at me. "Mr. Reeves, isn't it?"

"Yes, Caleb."

“Hmm.” He eyed me as he picked up his briefcase. “Well, Caleb, I’m glad to see you’ve worked on your time management skills this week. I was worried we might have a problem there.”

“No, and, um, I’m sorry about that. My train got held up Monday, that’s all.”

“Very well. Let’s make sure it doesn’t happen again. I appreciate the apology.”

Livingston went to step around me, but I blocked his path, knowing I needed to say this now or I might not get the opportunity again.

“Was there something else?”

“Uh, yeah—I mean, yes, sir.” When his brow furrowed, I swallowed and forged on. “I was wondering if there was any way I could switch seats with someone?”

Livingston let out a sigh. “I told you, the seats you were in Monday are your seats for the semester. Is there a reason why you need to switch?”

Yeah, it’s six feet, dark haired, and a total pain in the—

“Caleb? Do you have issues seeing the projector?”

“No, that’s—”

“Can you not hear me?”

“No. I just…” I bit down into my lip, trying to think of the best way to explain that my stepbrother was the most annoying human being on the planet.

“I don’t have all day, Mr. Reeves.”

“I just think I’d do better if I was in a different seat.”

Livingston narrowed his eyes, and as the seconds passed, I thought that maybe he was coming around.

I was wrong.

“The seats have been set. If I change it for one, I’ll be changing it for all. Now, if that’s all, I need to be going.”

When he stepped around me this time, I spun on him and blurted out, “I don’t get along with my brother.”

Livingston stopped and turned back to face me. “Your brother?”

“Stepbrother, actually.”

“Travis McKinney?”

“Yes, and we don’t get along.” Talk about understatement of the century.

Livingston shrugged, and my stomach dropped. “That sounds like a you problem, not a me problem. Your seat is your seat. You’re both adults, or supposed to be, so figure it out.”

“Figure it out?”

“Yes. You shouldn’t be talking in class anyway. Surely you can ignore each other for the time you’re in here. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’d like to go home for the weekend.”

IF THERE WAS one thing I was grateful for, it was that I had a place of my own to come home to after a long week. A place far enough away from Astor that I never ran into anyone from school on the weekends and could just unwind in peace. And after the first week of classes, I *needed* that peace.

Livingston hadn’t given an inch this afternoon, but as I stepped inside my third-floor prewar loft in Soho, I felt the tightness in my chest finally ease. This was my sanctuary, a place Travis had never come near. That felt like an important distinction to make, because he was everywhere.

At our parents’ home. At events I was hired to photograph. At Astor. And now my seatmate for the remainder of the semester.

God, what a fucking nightmare. He was the last person I wanted—or needed—to be around, and now he’d be there, provoking me at every turn. It was hard to remember that we’d ever gotten along in the first place.

But I wasn’t gonna think about him now. He’d taken up space in my brain for too many hours over the last week, and tonight I was going to spend time in my happy place. After spending the summer in South Africa photographing the wildlife, I had several weeks’ worth of photos to edit.

I grabbed my laptop out of my bag and reached for a beer as it powered up. Then clicked open the drive where I stored all my photos. Hundreds of folders popped up, all in alphabetical order. If there was one thing I was meticulous about, it was the way I saved my digital files.

I scrolled down the bottom to the South Africa folder and double-clicked. There were large cat shots, fantastic images I’d caught of a hippo as it launched itself out of the river, defending its calf, and my all-time favorites—the series featuring the herd of elephants we’d followed for a week.

I started with the elephants and got to work.

They were beautiful, commanding, majestic. They made me feel as though I was right back there in the thick of it, and that was the power of a well-taken photograph.

It was what I loved about taking pictures. They captured a moment in time, but evoked different emotions depending on who was viewing it, and that was all I ever hoped for when someone looked at one of my photos—to elicit a response, a feeling.

My eyes wandered to the only folder in the drive that was out of alphabetical order. The one marked *untitled*. It was in the far bottom left, away from all the others, and had remained unopened for months now—nearly a year according to the time stamp.

I dragged the mouse pointer over the folder, and my pulse skipped a beat.

Don't do it.

But one week in close proximity to Travis and my mind was all over the fucking place. He'd done it again, managed to slip past my defenses, get through the barriers I'd put in place—traffic, city blocks, doors and walls—and find his way into my space.

It was ridiculous. No, *I* was ridiculous. Because it was me who clicked open the folder. Me who watched the photos inside load. And it was me who couldn't seem to quiet Travis's voice in the back of my mind, reminding me that at one time I'd welcomed him into my space—*more* than welcomed him…

"CALEB! CALEB, YOU in here?"

I lifted my headphones off one of my ears and listened as Travis's footsteps echoed up the hall of the penthouse to where our bedrooms were located. It'd been a couple of years since our parents had gotten together, and he and his mom had moved in. It still sometimes caught me off guard. It felt strange to have him here.

Not strange in a bad way. Strange in having to share my space with someone after having it all to myself. Travis wasn't exactly the quiet type. He was loud and outgoing and had inserted himself into all aspects of my life until I found it well and truly meshed with his.

Which wasn't a bad thing. I'd been kind of an introvert before that, happier to view the world through a lens than step out and experience it for myself. But Travis had made it his mission to change that, and introduced

me to a whole new world where friends, parties and good times were just as fun as finding the perfect shot.

“I’m in my room,” I called back as I flicked through the photos I’d taken that morning from the rooftop. The city had been engulfed in a sea of fog, one of the most incredible sights I’d ever seen, and I’d captured it all on camera.

My door swung open, and I glanced up to see Travis filling it in the way he always did when he entered a room. It wasn’t that he was physically bigger than I was or imposing in any way, more his presence. From the black, scuffed-up military boots with the laces half undone, to the vintage wash jeans and black t-shirt and jacket with a bunch of different zippers, Travis was cool in ways I would never be. Add in the spiked black hair and icy blue eyes enhanced with liner, and he was difficult to ignore.

He leaned his shoulder against the doorframe and eyed me where I lounged back against my headboard. “Please tell me you’re up here looking at porn. If not, that’s just sad, man. It’s Friday night.”

I pulled my headphones down until they hung around my neck. “It’s Friday afternoon, and no, I’m not looking at porn.”

Travis’s lips crooked. “Would you admit it if you were?”

Probably not, but I wasn’t telling him that. He would give me shit for being embarrassed or a pussy. “Why would I lie?”

“Dunno. Maybe you’re shy.”

I rolled my eyes and returned my attention to the image on my computer. “Because I don’t want you using my porn subscription? That’s smart. Not shy.”

Travis chuckled and it was like the throaty sound was being amplified by the bass in my headphones. “You think I’m that hard up, huh?” He pushed off the door and sauntered into the room, perching his ass on the edge of my bed like it was his own.

“Aren’t you?” I grinned at him over my laptop. “You’re the one always bitchin’ how you ‘need to get some.’”

Travis flopped across the foot of the bed, slipping his hands under his head. “Yeah, but no one at school.”

“Oh? Been there and done that?”

Travis turned his head on the mattress and raised a brow. “You sayin’ I sleep around?”

“You saying you don’t?”

He opened his mouth but then quickly shut it. "Yeah, okay, fair enough. But that's why I'm here."

My eyes popped wide, and Travis let out a loud burst of laughter.

"Oh my God. You should see your face. I'm not here for that, *Caleb." His blue eyes trailed down over my casual crew neck, and he shrugged. "Unless you want to…"*

"Shut up."

"I mean, I'm open to it."

I shoved him with my foot, my cheeks hot with embarrassment. "That might be difficult, since I'm, you know, straight."

"Eh, just a minor obstacle."

I snorted then went back to flicking through my pictures, doing my best to calm my skipping heart. Travis always did this to me, had me making a fool of myself in front of him and feeling like some inexperienced virgin—which I wasn't. Again, proving that he was way cooler than I would ever be.

"Anyways, like I was saying, I'm here because I need to get out, have some fun, and guess what?"

I arched a cautious brow. "Do I have to?"

Travis rolled to his side and propped his head up on his hand. "East got us all fake IDs."

"Of course he did." East was the person I liked least in Travis's circle. I put up with him because he was part of the crowd, but the guy was so obnoxious.

"Right? There's a new club downtown, and we're going to check it out tonight. You wanna come?"

"Me?" I shook my head. "Uh, no. Not my scene. Plus, I don't have an ID, and—"

"Yes you do." Travis shifted to his back again and thrust his hips up, and I looked away. "I got him to make you one too." He leaned across the bed and held the card out to me. "You're one of the princes for real now."

Yeah, because that was my lifelong goal, to be one of the Park Avenue Princes. It was fitting—we all lived on Park Avenue—but having a name for a group just felt…douchey.

I glanced at the image staring back at me and shook my head. "I'm not using this."

"Why not? It's just a formality. You know East can—"

“Buy his way in to any club?”

“Well, yeah, we all can. This is just a safeguard.”

I glanced back at the face that looked nothing like mine and gestured for his. “I want to see yours.”

Travis proudly handed his over, and I screwed my nose up.

“Are you kidding?”

“What? It’ll do.”

“This looks nothing like you.”

“Sure it does.”

“Uh, no. It doesn’t. The angle of the jaw, nose, and cheekbones? They’re all wrong. They’re dull. Yours are sharp and your chin’s well defined. Your face is…you know, captivating. This is boring. There’s no way anyone will believe this is you.”

When nothing but silence met my ears, I looked up to see Travis’s face directly in my sightline. Where I thought I’d see a carefree smirk stretched across his smack-talking lips, they were slightly parted.

Shit. *Why did I say all of that? I’d gone off on a tangent, looking at him through my photographer’s lens, and now he thought I was hitting on him?*

The silence in the room suddenly filled with a ringing in my ears. As my heart began to thud loudly, I handed back his ID.

“You really should let me take your picture,” I said to fill the tense silence.

*Travis took it from me and ran a thumb over the photo, his eyes never leaving mine. “Because you think my face is…*captivating*?”*

“Because I can do a better job than that.” I pointed to the card. “Let me take your picture.”

He pushed to the edge of the bed, then turned to look at me. “You gonna come out with us tonight?”

I’d already decided against it after seeing the IDs, but even if I’d been undecided, the light now sparking Travis’s eyes would’ve made me decline.

“I don’t think so.”

He got to his feet and ran his teeth over his lower lip as he looked down at me. “Because of the IDs or because of my face?”

Jesus, I was never going to live that comment down. “Don’t flatter yourself.”

Travis walked to the door and, just as he was about to step through it, stopped and looked back at me. “I don’t need to. You did it for me. Night,

stepbrother.”

“Not yet we’re not,” I said as he strolled out of my room like nothing weird had just happened. But something had, because that was the first time I’d ever felt the need to clarify to myself that Travis McKinney wasn’t my actual brother, and I had no idea what that meant.

No idea at all.

I SLAMMED MY computer shut, knowing now *exactly* what had changed that night.

I’d noticed his stupid face. I’d looked at it the way I did anything beautiful.

I groaned in frustration. I couldn’t do this. I wasn’t going down this road again. I’d been burned by Travis before, and there was no way I was venturing back there.

No way I would ever trust him again.

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SIX

caleb

THE DOOR TO my parents' penthouse mocked me as I stood outside staring at the peephole. I'd lived here my whole life, first with my mom and dad and then Travis and Vera, running the halls and causing chaos. But now as I stood here I hesitated, and all because of what I knew I'd find when I stepped inside.

I was running late, which meant the whole family would likely already be here, and because the universe hated me, that "family" now included the one person in the world I would do anything not to have to sit across from at our monthly dinners.

It wasn't like I could do anything about it, though. This was the way it had been for a long time now. At least twelve excruciating dinners a year that I had to force myself to attend. I'd tried to skip it once, but was met with never-ending questions as to why. So it was just easier to suck it up and enjoy Vera's cooking, all the while pretending Travis didn't exist.

I took in a breath and unlocked the front door, mentally preparing myself for the next couple of hours ahead, and as I stepped inside, the sound of laughter drifted up the hall.

God, what would it feel like to just walk into that room and slip into whatever conversation was happening, not feel like I was the one who would suck the air right out of it? Because that always happened whenever Travis and I were in the same room. The air grew thick with whatever toxic emotions we were throwing at one another.

Tonight would be no different.

I made my way toward my dad's deep chuckle and found Vera and Travis standing at my dad's bar, where he was pouring them both a drink.

"There you are," Dad said. "We were worried you might've gotten lost."

"I mean, I was hoping." Travis spun around on his stool, his lips curving against the lip of his tumbler.

"So sorry to disappoint."

"Ignore him, honey." Vera hopped off her stool and kissed my cheek. "The train late again?"

"Again?"

"Travis was telling us how you got held up the first day of school too."

"Was he?"

"He was. It was lucky he saved you a seat."

"*Saved* me a seat?" I cut my eyes back to the smirking idiot.

"I'm nothing if not thoughtful like that."

What I wouldn't pay to be able to punch that grin off his smug face. "*So* thoughtful."

"Here you go." Dad handed me a craft beer and clapped me on the shoulder. "I had them stock the fridge for you tonight."

Travis made a gagging motion as I took a sip of the cold brew, and I couldn't help but hope he choked for real.

"Thanks, Dad, appreciate it."

"I'm curious," Travis said, nodding at the bottle I held. "Do you actually like that piss, or is it just the pretty labels that get you?"

"That's rich coming from someone who hits on anything even mildly attractive."

"That wasn't a no."

"It wasn't a yes, or did that go over your head?"

"I hope you're both hungry," Vera said, putting on a bright smile like that would defuse the situation. "I made enchilada stuffed shells."

That at least sounded promising, despite the company. If there was one good thing that came from family dinner nights, it was that Vera was actually pretty decent in the kitchen, which had surprised me when she and my dad first got together. I didn't think big-time actresses even knew how to turn an oven on.

We passed the formal dining room, where the custom marble table seated twenty, and headed into the family dining room. Tall tapered candles had already been lit along the smaller table and settings placed for the four

of us. Vera strived for a cozy ambience on these occasions, from the low lighting to the sound of jazz filtering in from the record player in the corner. While our parents took their seats at the head of the table, I reluctantly took the spot across from Travis. It was enough to endure these dinners, but having no other option but to see his face every time I looked up was a lot.

"Vera, you know what would be a great centerpiece? Some of those pampas grass stems in a vase," I said.

With elegant fingers, she placed her napkin in her lap and smoothed her hands across it. "You think so?"

Travis snorted. "He wants it to block out my face."

I *wanted* to kick him under the table. "Would that be so bad?"

Vera sighed and then pasted her smile back on. "Pass the salad, please, Travis."

Blue eyes held mine as he handed her the bowl. If this was a staring contest, I could play that and win. Travis may be the most stubborn ass I'd ever met, but I wasn't a push-over-and-let-him-conquer type.

"Caleb?" Dad said, and when I didn't respond, he snapped his fingers. "Vera spent hours getting dinner ready for us, and the least you could do is try the stuffed shells before they get cold."

Guilt. It always worked, and that was the only reason I tore my eyes away from Travis, effectively giving him the upper hand, so I could apologize to Vera. It wasn't her fault she'd birthed a menace to society.

"Sorry, Vera," I said, and scooped a healthy amount onto my plate. "This looks great. Thank you."

She flashed me a proud smile before handing me the salad bowl. "You're very welcome. I hope you like it."

"Don't worry," Travis said, picking up the serving spoon the second I put it down. "Caleb likes *almost* everything."

Don't respond don't respond don't respond.

Instigator was Travis's middle name, though, and I could feel him watching me, waiting for my comeback.

Instead, I kept my head down and shoveled a forkful of the pasta into my mouth. It was just the right amount of cheesy, and the mix of chicken, enchilada sauce, and green chilis hit the spot.

"This is awesome," I said, scooping up another half a pasta shell. "Top ten for sure."

Her brows lifted. “Really? I got the recipe from a friend of mine, and I wasn’t sure what you boys would think, so that’s a relief.”

“It’s covered in cheese,” Travis said. “What’s not to like?”

A faint blush crept into Vera’s cheeks, but she waved him off. “Just eat. Richard and I have a few things to discuss with you.”

“Me personally?” Travis shook his head and wiped his mouth. “Has my outfit tonight convinced you I should be the one to overhaul Caleb’s closet? Flannel doesn’t suit anyone.”

“Will you be serious for a second?” Dad answered.

Travis grinned around his fork. “I am being serious. Have you seen his jeans?”

“We’ve been hearing things about the behavior of you and those friends of yours—”

“All good things, I’m sure.”

“—and we think it’s time you buckle down and find some direction. Like Caleb.”

Travis turned his nose up and reached for his drink. “You wouldn’t say that if you knew what a lame-ass he was. Didn’t even last the whole night at our par—”

I all but choked around my mouthful of food as my dad slammed his knife down onto his plate. It was a rare day he lost his temper, but the flush on his cheeks was definitely rage-related right now.

“See, it’s this kind of behavior that isn’t going to win you any favors.”

Travis had never taken well to being reprimanded, even when we were back in high school, and that had only intensified since his time living alone and running wild with his know-it-all friends.

“You’d be surprised. My behavior gets me *a lot* of favors.” Travis’s eyes flicked back to mine, and the heat swirling there told me the exact kind of favors he was speaking of.

“Travis, don’t be so crass.” Vera sighed and shook her head, probably wondering how her little boy grew up to be the devil incarnate. “Richard is just trying to help you get some—”

“Direction, I know. So this family dinner tonight is really some kind of intervention?”

“Well, I hardly think you would’ve shown up if we’d told you what we wanted to talk about.”

“No shit I wouldn’t. It’s insulting.” Travis’s jaw twitched, and I saw a flash of hurt flicker across his features. “I have direction.”

Vera reached across the table to where Travis was white knuckling his fork and covered his hand. “I know, baby. We just think if you did a little less partying and focused more, you’d be able to narrow down your major.”

A tense silence descended over the table.

“I don’t like being ambushed,” Travis grumbled.

“And we don’t like your behavior of late.” Dad’s comment earned him an icy glare, and while I should’ve been happy that Travis’s irritation wasn’t directed at me, I felt a twinge of sympathy for him. “You’ve been arrogant, hostile, and extremely self-involved whenever we’ve been around, and this constant bickering between you and Caleb has to stop.”

“Well, that’s not just me.” Travis locked his gaze with mine. “*He’s* just as much a part of the ‘bickering’ as I am.”

“We know.” Those two words out of my dad’s mouth were probably the only thing that could’ve had me looking away from Travis in that moment because, *what the actual fuck?* “And Vera and I have decided it’s time to do something about it.”

I needed to speak up, and soon, or else I had a feeling I’d be sitting next to Travis at family therapy.

“I don’t need any kind of help or direction. I’m doing photography. You know that.”

Vera looked between the two of us before bringing her napkin up to the corner of her lips. “We do know that. But this isn’t just about you two.”

“Meaning?”

“After our trip to Peru, we’ve realized we’re holding on to too much. Too many material possessions that don’t matter, too much resentment for things that happened before we got together. Even the way we’ve contributed to environmental hardships such as eating red meat and poultry—”

Travis scoffed and pointed at his food with his fork. “Hate to break it to you, but chicken *is* poultry.”

“Honey, that’s not chicken. That’s plant-based chicken, not the real thing.”

Travis’s fork dropped to the plate with a clatter while Vera beamed proudly.

“See? You couldn’t even tell.”

The mouthful I'd been chewing suddenly became much harder to eat, and I had to force myself to swallow down the fake chicken. Even I had my limits.

"Like I was saying," she continued. "It's wasteful to hold on to things, and we're spending so much that could go to causes we care about. Like donating to a wildlife fund in your name, Caleb."

Uh…thanks?

"Paying for three places in the city is completely unnecessary, and not what we had planned when you two went off to college, so we feel it's time we downsized."

My brows popped high. Where the hell was she going with this?

"So…" She looked at Dad, who cleared his throat to take over, and when he looked directly at me, I felt a wave of uneasiness roll through my stomach. I wasn't sure if it was the hint of apology in his eyes or the fake chicken. Probably both.

"We're selling your loft."

I think I blacked out for a second, because it sounded like he just said he was selling my place, but that was impossible.

"You'll be moving in with Travis."

The entire room went dead silent except for the mournful song on the record player that fit the mood too well to be a coincidence.

Dad was joking. He had to be. He would never do something like this, not when he knew how much I loved having my own space, my own loft. My place away from the drama at Astor. Hell, he hadn't heard a nice word uttered between me and Travis for years, so there was no way he'd force us together. It was insane. Laughable. It had to be a joke.

I forced my shoulders to relax as I reached for my beer. "Nice one, Dad. You got me."

I didn't have to look up to feel the tension radiating off Travis ease a little, at least until Dad shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Caleb," he said. "But we're serious. Vera and I aren't willing to pay for you both to have your own places any longer."

The ringing in my ears grew louder as I struggled to understand the words coming out of his mouth, but it didn't make sense.

"But…" I sputtered. "Why do *I* have to move? I didn't do anything wrong. You just said it yourself—Travis can't take anything seriously."

“Okay, Mr. Sanctimonious,” Travis said. “I can take shit seriously. Not this, because *this* is the biggest crock of bullshit I’ve ever heard. But for the record, there’s no way I’d leave the Towers to move into some dingy *loft* in Soho.”

I gestured at Travis. “See? We can’t even have a civil conversation.”

“Then you’re going to have to work on it.” Dad’s mouth was drawn into a firm, no-nonsense line that had my stomach sinking. Why did it feel like he’d already made up his mind on this and there’d be no changing it?

“If this is about money, just give me my trust early and I’ll pay for it myself,” I said.

“No.”

“Then I’ll get a job.”

“You won’t find one that’ll cover your expenses,” Dad said, swirling what remained of his wine. “And the *why* is because the Towers are closest to Astor. You won’t have to worry about unreliable transportation, since you’ll have Scotty for whatever you need.”

“Wait a minute, aren’t you guys forgetting something?” Travis said. “I already *have* a roommate. Preston. Remember him?”

I nodded eagerly. “That’s right. You can’t force him to move out.”

“Oh, we didn’t have to force anything.” Vera smiled sweetly, as though talking to two people on the brink of a psychotic break. She wasn’t far off. “In fact, it was talking to Archer that helped solidify this idea of ours. He just asked Preston to move in with him.”

“The fuck he did,” Travis said, his jaw hitting the table. “I think I’d know if one of my best friends was about to shack up with his man.”

“Well, we asked them to keep it to themselves so we could—”

“Ambush us?” Travis and I said at the exact same time, and that we were now on the same page was a testimony to how fucked up this entire situation was.

“We are *not* ambushing you,” Dad said. “We are informing you of a decision we have made. It wasn’t made lightly, but it *has* been made.”

Travis slumped back in his seat. “Wow… I always knew you were a dick, but this—”

“*Travis*, I will not have you talk to Richard like that,” Vera said.

“Why? Because he dragged you to Peru and you got high on some woo-woo drugs that let him push you into this crazy plan?”

“How dare you.” Vera shot to her feet, shoving her chair back with such force it almost fell over. “I swear, your mouth is going to get you into a world of trouble one day, Travis. You should know by now that nobody tells me what to do. If anything, it’s your own outlandish behavior that *pushed* me into this decision.”

High color spread down Travis’s neck as he lowered his eyes to the plate, well and truly scolded but still not conceding.

Vera looked to me, a hopeful look in her eyes, as if I was going to agree with this asinine idea they had concocted. “You understand, don’t you, Caleb?”

She was joking, right? I was the one who was being asked to give up *everything*. How could she possibly expect me to understand? Probably because I was usually the more levelheaded one—but not about this.

In this instant, I was in full agreement with Travis. This was bullshit.

“No, sorry, I don’t.”

“Caleb,” Dad said, and when I turned on him, he had the good grace to look pained. “We understand this means uprooting your life—”

“Do you? Because to me it sounds like you don't really care.”

“That’s not true. It’s *because* we care that we’re doing this. You two”—he looked between me and Travis—“used to be best friends. What happened?”

We were not about to go into *that* with my dad. Hell, we couldn’t even talk about it between the two of us, and the narrowed eyes boring a hole in the side of my head told me to keep my mouth shut.

As if I’d ever want to relive that particular time in my life anyway.

My dad ran a hand over his weary face and looked up the table to Vera, who’d retaken her seat, a look of exhaustion on her beautiful face.

“Fine. Keep your secrets.” Dad shook his head. “But this animosity between you two, it doesn’t only affect you. It causes tension between all of us, and Vera and I will not let some silly schoolboy argument come between our family. We love each other too much, and we love the both of you.”

“Great way of showing it,” Travis mumbled.

“It is,” Vera said. “And maybe one day you’ll understand that. We just want what’s best for you both, and you were always happiest when you and Caleb were close.”

“So you’re just going to force the issue?”

“If we have to. You need to get your act together, Travis. You can’t just waltz through life thinking everything will fall at your feet. You are privileged, but I didn’t raise you to be a petulant brat.”

“And dumping him on me”—Travis gestured in my direction—“is supposed to make me, what? Change my bratty ways?”

“Or help you grow up a little. Caleb knows what he wants—”

Travis scoffed, and I was back to wanting to kick him under the table.

“Sure he does.”

“He does. He has direction and applies himself. I’m hoping if you spend some time together that maybe he’ll rub off on you.”

And for the first time since our parents had launched their nuclear attack, Travis’s scowl morphed into what I could only describe as a taunting sneer.

“You know what, Mom? I think that might be the first thing I agree with you on tonight.”

“Exactly,” she said, oblivious to what Travis really meant. But now I had something else to worry about on top of leaving my sanctuary behind. “This is going to work out, I can just feel it.”

I looked to my dad one last time as though he could save me from that scheming bitch fate, but just like always, she won out.

From the day Travis and I had met, it seemed our destinies were entwined. I’d done my best over the years to untangle myself from his web, only to find myself again ensnared in it, and the worst part about it all was our parents had no idea what they’d just done.

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SEVEN

travis

“YOU’RE BRAVE, SHOWING your face around here again,” I said as I pulled the door open to my ex-roommate—and almost ex-friend—Preston. It’d been a little over a week since Mom and Dick had dropped their little bomb on Caleb and me at dinner, and it’d taken me about that long to not want to murder Preston every time I looked at him.

And don’t even get me started on Archer—the true instigator of this whole mess. I couldn’t believe I’d ever had a crush on Daddy FILTH—Father I’d like to Fuck. He was dead to me now.

“And why are you knocking?” I stepped aside for Preston to walk in. “You still have your key card.”

He lifted his hand, and the card dangled from his fingers. “That’s why I’m here. I thought it was time to return it, since all my things are out now.”

“Gee, thanks for the reminder.” I snatched it off him and walked inside.

“No problem,” he said, chuckling. “I was also sent to make sure Caleb was still alive.”

My feet skidded to a stop as we entered the living room, and I spun on my traitorous friend. “Sent by who?”

Preston’s lips crooked up to one side and he shrugged. “Can’t tell you that.”

“You know, I don’t remember you being such a—”

“Shit stirrer? Agitator? General pain in the ass?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Let’s just look at it as payback. For the mature way you went about handling mine and Archer’s secret when we first got together.”

My mouth fell open. “Are you kidding right now? I didn’t tell a soul.”

“Oh, I know, but you sure had fun giving me shit about it. So I’m giving you a little taste of your own medicine.”

“By spying on me?”

“Exactly. I was the most obvious choice to find out how World War III was going. So the guys sent me in.”

“Feel free to tell them you found Caleb’s dismembered body in the bathroom.” Then I muttered, “Ass.”

“Aw, Trav. I’m gonna miss you.”

“You’re such a fucking liar.”

“I’m not. Who else would give me hell the way you do?”

I crossed my arms and tried not to look too put out. “I guess I could always call and start your day off right.”

Preston grinned and rounded the couch to wrap me in a bear hug that took me off guard. “You’d do the same, you know—move in with Archer if he asked—so really, you can’t blame me.”

I tried to wriggle out of his hold. “Stop making sense, you preppy shithead.”

His laugh vibrated through me, and he gave one last squeeze before letting go. “I think this’ll be a good thing for you. I know you’ve had your issues with Caleb, but—”

“Don’t say it,” I warned.

“—you’re roommates now. Fighting all the time will eventually get exhausting, and when it does, maybe you can find some common ground again.”

I narrowed my eyes, wishing they would shoot actual daggers. “I hate you.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’ll get over it.”

“And I’m not at all jealous you get to live with Daddy Filth.”

Preston’s lips quirked up on the side. “You are, but I get it. I pinch myself every day that he even looked in my direction.”

“Ugh. You’re too happy and ruining my bad mood. Go away.”

“I will. As soon as I see proof of life.”

“Proof of—” I rolled my eyes. “Gimme a break. If I’d gotten rid of Caleb’s ass, I would’ve bragged about it already.”

“And vice versa,” Caleb said as he walked out of his room carrying a cardboard box. He set it on the kitchen island before leaning his hip against

it. “Found a couple of your things in the back of the closet.”

“Deep, *deep* in the closet, no doubt.” Preston shot him a wink that only months ago he never would’ve done. I’d been the only one who knew his long-term relationship with Archer’s daughter had only been for show, but now that he’d blasted himself out of the closet in an epic scandal, I guess the flirt inside his good-boy persona was finally making its way out. Or maybe it was my influence.

I liked to think it was the latter.

“See? He’s alive,” I said. “So you can go give your traitor spy report to whoever now.”

Caleb lifted a brow at Preston. “You’re here to spy? You Park Avenue Dicks are lame as hell, aren’t you?”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Preston said. “After all, you’re one of us again.”

As a choked sound came out of Caleb, I struggled not to lunge at Preston. “He is *not* one of us. So stop rolling out the damn red carpet, Judas.”

Preston held his hands up and went over to grab his box off the island. As he hefted it into his arms, he grinned at Caleb. “I’d say good luck, but I think you’re gonna need more than that.”

“Yeah, more like a miracle,” he muttered.

“Trav? Walk me out?”

“Throw you out? Sure.” I pulled the door open for Preston and then followed him out to the hall. Without his key card, he needed mine to call for the elevator, and even though I was annoyed at him, at least it got me away from my new roommate for a breather.

“I know you don’t see it right now, but this is a good thing,” Preston said.

“Stop saying that.”

“It can’t get any worse.”

I snorted out a laugh. “Just remember, you did this.”

“Pretty sure your parents did this.”

“And you let them. The blood’s on your hands too.”

As the elevator door opened, he shuffled the box under one arm and squeezed my shoulder. “You two have some shit to work out, but then…”

I frowned. “But then what?”

A small, knowing smile curved Preston’s lips, and he shrugged as he stepped into the elevator.

“Hello? But then what?” I shouted, but he only kept smiling as the doors closed. “Fucker.”

I let out a sigh and ran a hand through my hair as I turned and trudged back into my condo—or prison cell, as it felt these days. I mean, what else could I call my living situation? When I wasn’t in school or out with the guys, I was stuck back here with the cellmate that my wardens—*parents*—had chosen for me.

Don’t get me wrong, it was more a luxurious white-collar prison than anything threatening, but that didn’t make it any less stifling, and every time I turned around, Caleb was right *there*.

“Preston leave already?”

See? Always there. “Why?” I looked over to where he’d just stepped out of his bedroom. “Were you planning to kiss him goodbye?”

Caleb rolled his eyes. “You’re a real ass, you know that?”

“And?” I marched into the kitchen, hoping to put some much-needed distance between us. But just my luck, he followed.

“You going to be like this for the rest of our time at Astor?”

I yanked open the fridge and glared at him over the top of the door. “Only when you’re around.”

Caleb braced his hands on the counter. “I don’t know why you’re so pissed. I’m the one who had to move.”

“So you tell me at *every* opportunity you get.” I grabbed a Coke from the top shelf, then spotted a four-pack carton of hipster brew sitting on the other side and felt my blood start to boil. “How many times do I have to tell you? You are the bottom in this place, not me. Bottom two shelves in the fridge and bottom three shelves in the pantry.” I yanked the carton out of the fridge, clanging the bottles together. “Keep your piss water on your shelf.”

Caleb rounded the end of the counter and snatched the beer out of my hand. “Jesus, calm down, would you? I didn’t have any room.”

“Welcome to my world.”

“Oh, because I take up so much space.”

He had no idea.

Up until that fateful dinner with our parents, I’d been able to deal with the fact that he’d creep into my mind at the most inconvenient times. But

now I was stuck with him invading my brain *and* home.

“Just move, would you.”

Caleb let out a sigh and stepped aside, and as I brushed by, the familiar scent of his soap found me. He’d been using the same brand since we lived together, and as it weaved its hypnotic spell around me, I had a flash of myself in the shower, age sixteen, with that bar of soap and my cock in hand, imagining it was his.

“Travis?”

“What?”

“Preston said he was checking I was alive. The guys haven’t asked before now? I figured they’d be giving you shit all week about this situation.”

Yeah, so had I, but as if they knew better than to fuck with me right now, they’d left it alone. “They only bother with things that matter.”

Caleb grabbed a beer and popped off the top. “And I don’t, that’s what you’re saying.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You’re pathetic.” He flicked his bottle top into the trash. “There’s so much more to life than the group of you.”

“You only say that because you’re no longer one of us.”

“Right.” He strolled out of the kitchen and stopped beside me. “’Cause you’re *so* cool.”

He continued into the living room and scooped up the remote, and I didn’t even notice the way his jeans stretched tight across his ass. Not at all.

“Cooler than you.”

“Uh huh, so much so you have to tell me.” Caleb flopped down on the couch and kicked his feet up on the coffee table. “Save it for someone who’ll be impressed with your shit. I know better.”

Sure he did. He’d been happy enough to be one of us until everything went to hell.

“Must be lonely up there on your high horse.”

“Better than being surrounded by a bunch of sycophants.”

I glared down at him, hoping to laser-beam him through the floor, and when that didn’t work and I still hadn’t answered, the smartass added, “That means someone who will kiss your ass to gain an advantage just in case—”

“I know what it means.”

Caleb smirked. “I couldn’t be sure.”

“You’re in my spot.”

He glanced around at all the open seats in the room. “Looks like you’ll need a new one, then, doesn’t it?”

Was it really my spot? No. Didn’t stop me from stepping in front of him, knocking his feet off the coffee table, and blocking his view of the TV. “Move.”

He brought his beer to his lips and kept staring straight ahead, like he could see through me. That gave me a split second to actually look at him without his eyes on me, and I took a mental snapshot of the tousled way his hair looked when he ripped off his slouchy beanie after a long day. The way his full lips wrapped around the opening of his beer.

God, this was gonna kill me, wasn’t it?

Caleb looked up at me and smirked as he settled back into the cushions. “Nah.”

That was the problem with staring. It made you forget what the hell you were saying in the first place. “Excuse me?”

“I said, nah. As in, I’m not moving, but thanks for asking.”

Oh. Right. “I wasn’t asking. I was telling you. Move.”

Caleb faked a yawn and spread his arm out along the back of the couch, clearly intent on keeping his ass right where it was.

I could play this game. I stepped in between his spread thighs and leaned down over him, resting one hand on the cushion by his head and angling myself closer than I knew I should’ve. Surprise lit Caleb’s eyes before he scooted up like he could get away from me.

“If you won’t move, I could make you,” I said, daring to get in his face. “Or maybe you’d rather I sit in your lap. I’m good either way.”

“Don’t even fucking think about it.”

“Too late. And I’m oh so tempted.” I dropped my knee on the couch between his thighs, and Caleb’s hand shot out to push against my chest. Look at that. I’d already succeeded in him touching me.

“Knock it off, Travis.”

“Why? No one’s here. You don’t have to put on an act if there’s anything you’re…curious about. Anything you wanna try.” My gaze dropped to his lips. “Or taste.”

“You think no one can possibly resist you, is that it?”

“No. I just don’t think *you* can.”

Caleb’s brown eyes held mine, and just when I expected him to deny, deny, deny, he moved. He stood up, brushing against me and forcing me back.

With his face only inches from mine, it would’ve been so easy to close the distance between us. I might’ve considered it if I thought there was any chance he’d reciprocate, but even the tension between us wasn’t enough to have me making the first move. Not now.

“You,” Caleb said, his voice low as the alcohol on his breath swept across my lips, “are pathetic.”

I blinked, stunned, as he sidestepped me and brought his beer back up to his mouth. All I could do in his wake was stare, and that wasn’t like me at all. I just watched him walk toward his room, took in the fit of his ass in those jeans, and then realized…he was right. I *was* pathetic.

Pathetic for wanting someone I so obviously never could, or would, have.

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EIGHT

caleb

DAD AND VERA were out of their minds if they thought this living situation was going to end in anything less than a bloodbath. Travis lived to provoke, for fuck's sake, and I didn't see him letting up on that anytime soon. He was just trying to get a reaction out of me any way he could, and he thought poking at a sore point in our relationship would be the best way to do that.

Sad thing was, it was working. I couldn't *not* react when he pulled those stunts. When he got close enough in my space that I could see his heartbeat pulsing rapidly in his neck. Apparently I did that to him, riled him up the same way he did me, and I didn't know how to fix it. I hated conflict in general and would've rather kept to myself and separated from the drama, the way I'd been *trying* to do by getting my own place away from Travis and his crew. I'd succeeded for the most part, except for the occasional run-ins that couldn't be avoided. Family dinner included.

The TV was still on full blast, the way it'd been since I left Travis by the couch and headed into my room. I doubted he was even watching anything. He'd probably just turned up the volume to be obnoxious, but whatever. I threw on my headphones, blared my music, and started editing some photos from a red carpet event I'd gotten paid for a few nights ago.

I was in my zone, working away, when my phone lit up with a message.

JT:

Sorry…

I frowned. Sorry? For what?

I started to write him back, but before I could send the message, a loud banging sound cut through my music.

What the hell is that?

When it continued, I ripped off my headphones and pushed off the bed, ready to kill Travis for being such a pain in the ass.

But when I hauled open my door, I saw him grumbling and cursing on the couch at whoever it was trying to beat our front door down. It seemed urgent, like a pack of firefighters desperate to get in.

"What's going on?" I shouted, but he wasn't getting up to see, even though he looked annoyed as shit. "Wow, don't lift a finger or anything."

He shook his head at me, but I didn't have time to decipher what that meant when the pounding was starting to match the throb in my head.

The second I unlocked the door, a rush of bodies entered our condo, one after the other, all of them hyped up and bringing the noise inside with them. And every single one was a blasted Park Avenue Prince or significant other.

You've got to be kidding me.

"Caleb, my man," Donovan said, clapping my shoulder.

I tried to shrug him off, but his grip was tight. "I'm not your man."

"Oh, come on, don't be like that. We used to all have fun together."

"That was a long time ago."

Out of the corner of my eye, Gavin grabbed the remote, cutting off the TV, and Travis put up a fight until Daire stepped up behind Gavin. That grumpy bad boy wasn't one I'd ever bond with, and the muscles he'd honed over the past few months professionally fighting weren't exactly endearing. They just screamed, *Get the fuck away*, or in Travis's case, *Get the fuck up and don't give my boyfriend shit about it.*

"What is this?" I said, finally pushing away Donovan's arm. "An intervention?"

Someone in the group snorted, and East stepped forward.

"No, it's what we do best." He paused for dramatic effect and arched a brow. "Throw a party."

"A party?"

"Yes. We gave you some time to get settled, and now it's time to reintroduce you to *our* way of life."

This was not happening. It'd been bad enough when my parents forced me to move in with Travis, but they said nothing about having to hang out with this bunch of entitled morons.

I shook my head and started to back away. "I don't think so."

"Uh-uh-uh." Donovan stepped in behind me. "You're not going anywhere."

"Exactly, and that includes any dumb party."

"Oh for fuck's sake." Travis glared in my direction. "If he wants to be a wet blanket, let him be."

"Yes, but you're forgetting something," East cut in. "This isn't about you. It's about Caleb. We're throwing him a 'Welcome back to the group' shindig."

"I'm not back."

"Back?" JT's eyes narrowed on me from across the room, where he stood with West's arms wrapped around his waist. "You were one of them?"

I could see the accusation in his eyes, and felt a twinge of guilt somewhere low in the pit of my stomach. It wasn't that I'd been hiding it from JT—I just didn't like to talk about that time in my life.

"One of us?" Preston chuckled. "He and Travis were practically glued at the hip."

"Yep." Donovan grinned at me, and I wanted to punch that pretty smile right off his model-perfect face. "Double trouble. Used to get up to all kinds of crazy shit back in the day."

"Yeah, I don't really want to talk about this."

"That makes two of us," Travis chimed in, shooting daggers at me from across the room.

"That's okay," East said, a shit-eating smirk curling his lips. "That's what we're here for. To drink, get merry, and reminisce about when you used to be fun. Then plan some sort of soiree to let everyone know we've let you back into the fold."

Jesus, were these guys fucking dense or what? "I'm *not* back."

Gavin scrunched his nose up and shrugged. "You look pretty back to me."

I let out a frustrated sigh and gritted my teeth. The way I saw it, I had two choices here—go willingly to this ridiculous party they were talking about and get it over with, or risk being hauled up to the roof by Daire and the behemoth I knew was Donovan's boyfriend, Kelly.

If I went with the first, they'd likely get bored with someone as low key as myself and decide it would be more fun to go out than bother with me. If I went with the second…

Yeah, there was no way I was going with the second.

"Fine. Let me grab a jacket and—"

"Ooh, no." West let go of JT and strolled over. "We're not giving you a chance to lock yourself in your room."

West flashed his charmer's smile at me, but unfortunately for him, I wasn't buying what he was selling. I knew it was a con.

"I'm not five, asshole."

"Yeah, but you're pigheaded enough to do it to spite us, and that would upset my boyfriend."

My eyes shifted to where JT stood, alone now, looking at me as though I was a complete stranger. I probably should've told him about my connection to these guys when we first met, but he'd already been so entangled with West that it would've just seemed like I was trying to get in the way. He had needed to make up his own mind, and I just offered some insider's input but from an outsider's perspective.

An admittedly vague outsider.

"Well, since he's the only one I give a shit about—"

"Careful who you go sniffing around." West's smile took on a dangerous edge. "He's taken."

"I meant as a friend, dickwad. I'm just going to grab my jacket."

"I'll go with him," JT said, throwing me the lifeline I so desperately needed right then.

"Fine." East looked at his watch. "But if you're not back here in five seconds, I'm sending in Daire."

With a final glare in all their directions, JT and I headed down the hall to my room, and when he shut the door, I finally let out the breath I'd been holding.

Fuck. This was the exact thing I'd been hoping to avoid moving back in here. It was bad enough I had to be around Travis, but now I was being pulled back into the princes' world too.

"Were you ever going to tell me?" JT's tone was equal parts accusatory and hurt, but I couldn't get into this now with him. If there was one thing I knew about East, it was that he kept his word, and if he said five seconds, he meant it.

“Can we talk about this later?” I grabbed up my beanie and pulled it on. It wasn’t exactly cold out, but it acted like a security blanket, and right now I needed all the help I could get.

“I mean, I want to say yes, but I’m not sure *later* will actually happen. It’s been, what? A year, and in all that time you never thought to once mention you used to run with this group?”

I snatched up my jacket, again more as something to hold on to than actually wear, like a shield to ward off evil. Then I turned to face my friend —and yes, over the past year, JT had become a friend, a good one.

“I wanted to, several times, but… Look, it’s complicated, that’s all.”

“I get that, but—”

East stuck his hand inside my door and tapped his watch. “Tick, tick, assholes.”

I grimaced and shrugged at JT. “Later.”

He frowned, looking unconvinced, but it would have to do for now. The last thing I wanted was to be hauled by my arms and legs to an elevator.

We followed East back out to the living room to see West the lone person standing there. “They went on ahead.”

I glanced over my shoulder to my room, and East snorted. “Don’t even think about it.”

“I don’t know why you’re bothering with this. I’m not coming back.”

West slung his arm around JT as we headed for the door. “Hate to break it to you, but you’re already back.”

“Under duress.”

“Doesn’t matter how.”

“Kinda does,” I grumbled as he shoved his phone under the keypad. I knew I was acting like a fucking brat, but it wasn’t like Travis was acting any better.

“Oh, the drama.” East rolled his eyes. “So you and Travis hate each other. I hate everyone, and I manage to function.”

“You don’t have to *live* with everyone.”

“That’s true. But I do have to put up with Golden Boy.”

“Fuck you, East.”

East smirked but said nothing as the elevator opened and we stepped inside. I moved to the back to get as far away from prying eyes as possible, wishing like hell I could up and disappear. A night under a microscope was not how I wanted to spend my Sunday.

Maybe I could find a quiet corner and hurl myself off the edge of the building…

The doors opened up to the rooftop patio of the Towers, and the one thing I *was* excited about was checking out the view from up here. I'd seen it during the day, but this was the first time I'd ventured up here at night.

There were twinkling lights strung across the overhead awning, where several couches, loungers, and hanging chairs were being occupied by most of the group except for Kelly and Donovan. They were all over each other at the end of the infinity pool that ran along one side of the roof.

Jesus, that didn't take long. We'd been a handful of minutes, tops.

I let out a sigh and figured the sooner I got this over with, the sooner I could leave, as West led JT off to join Gavin and Preston.

Spotting a few open seats, I beelined it in that direction, noticing Travis was missing.

Did he leave? Maybe my night was turning around after all.

"He's at the bar." The deep voice to my left caught me off guard, and when I turned to see Mr. Carrington—*Archer*—standing beside me, my eyes widened.

God it was weird seeing him here. I knew he was Preston's boyfriend, but still, I'd only ever thought of him as the president of the Elysium—ex now—and Serena's dad.

"He's sulking."

I nodded, disappointed Travis hadn't left. But hardly surprised at where he'd gone. "That tracks."

Archer gestured to an empty seat, and I quickly took it.

"You look about as comfortable as I did the first time I spent a night out with these guys."

"Yeah, well, I didn't choose to be here. You did."

Archer's lips curved as he looked across the firepit to where Preston stood laughing with Gavin. "Well, can you blame me?"

It took everything I had not to roll my eyes, because *of course* I was sitting next to a love-struck fool. Apparently it was contagious in this bunch, though why I was surprised they were infecting one another with anything was beyond me.

"Uh huh."

Archer chuckled and took a sip of his drink. "You sound less than impressed."

“Sorry, but you and Preston aren’t really high on my favorite people list.”

“I can understand that.”

When he didn’t elaborate, I turned to eye him. “Are you dying to say something like ‘it’s for my own good’?”

He laughed, and his eyes crinkled at the sides. “No. I was actually thinking it was more for *my* own good.”

“Ha, well, least you’re honest.”

“You want a drink?”

“I want about three, but…” I looked to the bar.

“Travis is over there.”

“Right.”

“Well, since I’m the one that got you in this mess, why don’t I do you a favor and go and get you one…or three. What’s your poison?”

After putting in my order, Archer got to his feet and made his way across the patio, making sure to stop and kiss Preston on the cheek. The sappy smile Preston aimed up at his man was enough to make my stomach twist.

So, I got to my feet and headed over to the balcony to take in the magnificent view of the Chrysler Building and city skyline twinkling in the distance. It was such a different perspective of the city to the loft, and it made me nostalgic for what I’d left behind. It also made me acutely aware of just how different my life was going to be after a mere address change.

I turned back to face the group laughing and drinking with one another and knew that if I wanted to survive the next year, I was either going to have to get a thicker skin or be eaten alive. There was no in between with these guys. If you were one of them, you were expected to be where they were and act a certain way, and unfortunately, they’d their sights set on me.

Many would kill to be in my position. I was just trying my best not to kill each and every one of them.

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NINE

travis

“DO YOU SEE that?” I pointed with my shot glass at the group of traitors huddled around Caleb and narrowed my eyes. “It’s like the last few years meant shit.”

Wayne, rooftop bartender extraordinaire, followed my gaze and tossed the towel he’d been polishing glasses with over his shoulder. “Looks like a case of shiny new toy.”

“More like old toy made new again. Have they forgotten we hate him?” I leaned back with my elbow on the bar and threw back the rattlesnake shot—which I thought was an appropriate name, considering one had taken over this little party. Not to mention the drink was deceptively good, like shooting a chocolate cappuccino. Could I use something stronger? Possibly. Was I drinking my weight in these enough I’d feel it eventually? Definitely.

Wayne took the empty glass from me and cocked a brow. “Another?”

“Fuck yes, and keep ’em coming.”

The good thing about kicking everyone off the rooftop except for us was that I could commandeer the entire bar, since everyone else was busy making sure Caleb knew he was welcome here.

Were they kidding with this shit? Seriously. It was more than obvious Caleb didn’t want anything to do with us, and even if that weren’t the case, *I’d* made it a point to mention at every opportunity that he wasn’t welcome.

Even East, who didn’t like anyone, seemed to have taken charge of the night and forced Caleb back into the group every time he tried to escape. What the hell were they doing? Was there some kind of prank about to

happen that I didn’t know about? Because that was the only thing that would make sense.

Maybe they’d throw him fully clothed into the pool in a minute. *Or down the elevator shaft…*

I swallowed as I watched the scene, feeling for the first time like the odd man out.

But that wasn’t what was bothering me so much. I veered off to do my own thing all the time, so the real issue here was…

Well, something I wasn’t about to acknowledge, that was for damn sure.

“One for here, one for the road,” Wayne said, setting two more rattlesnake shots in front of me.

“For the road? You trying to get rid of me?”

“Nah. You just look about ready to stir things up.”

I slid a couple Benjamins across the bar. “You’re a good man, Wayne. If the guest of honor comes over, tell him you only have piss beer available, none of the fancy shit.”

He pocketed the bills and nodded. “You got it.”

I tossed back one of the shots and then grabbed the other to take with me. Kelly, his longer hair still dripping wet from the pool, took one look at me, quickly wrapped his arms around Donovan, and backed away until they both fell ass-first into the deep end.

What, did I have something on my face? Besides a murderous look? I thought I always looked pretty damn fabulous, but judging by the wary glances I was getting from the others, that wasn’t what they were thinking tonight.

“Looks like you’re all making yourselves at home together,” I said, my lips stretching thin. It didn’t escape my notice that Caleb already had his drink of choice somehow, and I would’ve bet serious money that meant someone else grabbed it for him. Narrowing my eyes, I sussed out who I thought that unfortunate soul was when my gaze landed on Archer.

Of course. Daddy Filth, making sure the newbie was taken care of. I didn’t know whether to be annoyed or jealous at the attention Caleb had received, since Archer wasn’t exactly a slouch in the looks department. Even though he was now dead to me.

“The fuck are you drinking?” Daire leaned over, sniffed my shot, and recoiled. “Chocolate milk?”

I yanked my hand away. “Get your own.”

“There’s no alcohol in that shit.”

“There is,” I said, glancing down at it. “A little.”

“That’s why you’re being such a miserable fuck. Not enough alcohol.”

No, the reason I was being such a miserable fuck was standing several feet away from me, laughing at something JT had just said.

This was so not like me, to skulk around like some sad-sack loser. I was usually the one demanding everyone else have a good time. But somewhere around East’s declaration of *We’re throwing him a “Welcome back to the group” shindig*, my mood had taken a nose dive.

Okay, that was a lie. It’d started going south the second I found out I was going to have a new roommate.

“Oh no, why so sad? Have you lost the power to glare someone to death?” West’s dumbass laugh had me trying to find the power right then so I could level him with my best drop-dead look, but unfortunately, he was right. Everyone was still upright and breathing.

“I’m not glaring at anyone.”

“Yeah? So that’s what? The look of love I see aiming straight for the heart of—”

“Say it and die.” I looked on either side of West and frowned. “Where’s your sleeper spy boyfriend?”

“*Sleeper* spy? Come on now. It wasn’t like their friendship was a secret.” West pursed his lips and looked between me and Caleb, tapping his cheek. “Unlike *some* things people aren’t sharing with the group.”

“There’s nothing to share.”

“Me thinks thou doth protest too much.”

“*Thou* has been spending too much time with his Golden Boy at poetry nights to be spouting shit like that to me. Caleb and I had a falling-out. That’s it.”

“A falling out of what?” East sidled up beside his best friend. “Bed?”

I’d happily glare all these fuckers to death right now. If only to get them to shut their damn mouths.

“You’re amongst friends—you can tell us.” East waggled his brows. “Did things get a little *incestuous* back in the day?”

None of your goddamn business.

“Oh, would you look at that.” East ran the tip of his tongue over his top lip as though tasting something deliciously forbidden—otherwise known as

my teenage angst. “I think we might’ve just stumbled on the reason Travis is so…hard up.”

I immediately dropped my eyes down past my waist, because the motherfucker was right.

It didn’t matter if I was actively loathing Caleb or cursing the very ground he walked on. One mention of what we’d gotten up to back on that night and my traitorous teenage hormones took control of my dick. It was like I was on a vicious merry-go-round, and now these lunatics were on there making it spin faster.

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t *not* say that.”

“You’ve held out on us all this time, and we’ve let you,” West added. “But it’s obvious, man. Something went down, and I’m not sayin’ names, but it rhymes with Cravis.”

East snorted. “How do you know what went down doesn’t rhyme with Maleb?”

“Oh I don’t, but I’m sure Cravis would *love* to confess his sins to his best friends and get it off his chest.”

“As long as he doesn’t get it off in his pants, and in front of me.” East looked pointedly at where I was still packing a semi, and I rolled my eyes and downed the rest of my rattlesnake.

Had they given me space when it came to Caleb? Not really. They still made barbed remarks whenever we ran into him, poking at me like they knew something they didn’t. I’d never told a soul what happened, and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt Caleb hadn’t either.

“Daire.” I held up my empty shot glass. “Something stronger?”

“For the love of fuck, please. Another chocolate shot and I’d throw your pathetic ass off the roof.”

As he headed off to get me something I had no doubt would make me breathe fire, my cock finally got the message nothing was worth getting up for and settled down. Just in time for Caleb to look my way.

That he didn’t look entirely miserable was something of a surprise, since he’d all but kicked and screamed his way out of the apartment. Then again, he’d bonded with JT right off the bat.

It only made me want to reach over and strangle West for complicating an already fragile situation. None of us ever thought he’d actually fall for JT when we issued the bet to corrupt him.

Caleb was watching me. The dwindling flames in the firepit kept half his face in shadows, but I would've felt his gaze even if my back had been turned. The look he was aiming my way was one I couldn't decipher. His full lips weren't turned down, no crease between his brows. His eyes weren't shooting daggers through me. It was almost as if he were just… looking. Not actively hating me. Definitely not *liking* me, but I could handle that. I thought. Although my dick was in serious confusion mode behind my boxer briefs, wondering whether to stay up or down.

"You do know we can see you both," West said. "Now you see why we threw the party?"

"No."

"Just trying to make sure you get your…happy ending."

East threw his arm around my shoulders, backing us away from West. "You leave my guy out of this. Sexual interpretations of happy endings, yes. Anything including boring coupledom, absolutely not."

I leaned back to grin at him. "Exactly. Thank you."

"Can't lose my fellow bachelor to"—he flicked his hand at the rest of the group—"that. I simply wanted to incorporate your brother back into the group to save your thumb from all the social media stalking."

"Stepbrother," I said without thinking.

West smirked as he took the tiny straw from his bourbon sour and bit down on the end. "Riiight. I forgot that little fact."

"Pretty important fact to forget."

"I mean…" East grinned liked the devil. "If you want to play it straight."

I snorted. "Yeah, I'm not the one doing that."

West's eyes popped wide. My mouth was once again writing checks I shouldn't be cashing.

"Where's Daire with those damn drinks?"

"Fuck, man," Daire grumbled as I spun around and all but ran into him. "Cool your tits."

"I'm thirsty." And needed something to do other than run my damn mouth. I was never this loose-lipped unless it involved *another* set of lips—or cock—but something in the air was making me spill my secrets tonight.

"Jesus, Daire." West eyed the tray Wayne, the trusty bartender, was holding full of shot glasses that were filled to the brim with clear liquor and littered with limes. "He said something strong, not something to *kill* him."

“I don’t care.” And at this point, I really didn’t. I wanted—no, needed—another drink, and then maybe a ball gag to shut me the fuck up. I snatched two shots off the tray, as did the rest of the guys, and on the count of three we slammed them back to back.

Fuck. West might be right. That shit might just kill me. But when I spotted a lone glass left on the tray, I reached for it. Damn the consequences.

The alcohol lit a fiery path all the way down to my toes, and when my eyes stopped watering from the sheer intensity of it, they once again found Caleb through the flickering flames, and the look on his face was one I knew all too well.

Disapproval. Or maybe it was disappointment? Either way, it was so intrinsically Caleb that I wasn’t even surprised to see it there.

It was familiar. Almost *comfortable*.

My dick didn’t respond to *that* look at all.

In fact, there wasn’t one thing here right now that my cock *was* interested in besides what it shouldn’t be, and that was just sad—to look as good as I did, be as *available* as I was, and be hanging around at a party with all of my hooked-up friends.

Ugh, this was all wrong. I needed to get out of here. I’d shown my face. Shown that I could play nice—by staying at least six feet away from Caleb at all times. Now it was time to get the fuck out.

I turned to the only person I’d even consider as my wingman tonight.

“East, you wanna bounce?”

His eyes narrowed a fraction, then he put his empties on the tray and nodded.

West looked over his shoulder to JT. “Why don’t you wait, and the rest of us—”

“The rest of you aren’t invited.”

“Like I give a fuck.” Daire headed off to no doubt find the only person he did give a fuck about.

West, on the other hand, was not so easy to get rid of. “Seriously, let me tell everyone, and we’ll—”

“Stay right here. This is a singles-only kind of night.”

“Caleb’s single.”

“He doesn’t count.” I turned back to the lone bachelor of the group. “East?”

He shrugged and clapped his best friend on the shoulder. “Sorry, friend, better go find your Golden Boy to cuddle up to.”

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TEN

caleb

A DISTANT SOUND somewhere in the condo pulled me from the sleep I'd finally succumbed to after the party I'd been dragged to against my will.

It hadn't been all that bad, as it turned out, since the main reason I hadn't wanted to go up and left about thirty minutes in. No surprise there—Travis hadn't exactly been rolling the red carpet out for me since I'd moved in. That his friends had decided to *embrace* the change seemed to piss him off to no end.

Not that I could blame him. We'd been in a vicious cycle for years now, where the only kind of contact we had was volatile, and now I was trespassing on his turf.

Well, it was my turf too now. It wasn't like I *wanted* to be there any more than he wanted me there. But there was nothing either of us could do about it, so he needed to get over it or the next year was going to be hell on earth.

A second, much louder sound came from out in the living room, and I looked to my shut door before glancing at the clock on my bedside table—three thirty.

Fucking Travis.

God knew what shape he was in out there if he was running into furniture, or if it was even him. For all I knew, he could have brought someone home with him, and they could be the ones impersonating a bull in a china shop.

I squeezed my eyes shut and wondered if I was going to have to get up and grab my headphones. Travis was hardly the type to come home alone,

and with the mood he'd been in lately, this would be the perfect way for him to prove a point.

Nope. I wasn't going to think about that. In fact, I did a quick scan of my room, searching out my headphones just in case I started hearing banging of a different variety echoing through the condo. But when fifteen agonizing minutes passed by and the place remained silent, I figured I was in the clear.

Guessing he'd made it to his room and passed out, I decided to head out and grab myself a glass of water and a couple of Tylenol. Might as well get a head start on the hangover that might creep up and make my Monday *extra* Monday.

I ran a hand through my hair and pulled open my bedroom door, covering a yawn as I headed down the hall doing my best to be quiet. The last thing I wanted was rouse the beast that had stumbled through our place minutes earlier.

The lights from the surrounding buildings illuminated our place enough that I could make my way to the kitchen. So I grabbed a glass from the cabinet and filled it with some water before reaching for the pills and throwing them back.

I was about to head to bed and try to get a couple more hours of sleep when a low groan met my ears and my feet froze in place.

Shit.

My head whipped in the direction of the sound, and for the first time in a long time I sent up a prayer that it was Travis making that noise and not someone else. Or Travis with *someone* else. *Oh God, please don't let it be that.*

I waited in the kitchen, so still I might not have even been breathing, and when it became clear I was either going to have to spend the next few hours there or make a mad dash for my bedroom, I decided to make a break for it.

Doing my best not to make a sound, I tiptoed out of the kitchen and was about to make a run for it—

"Caleb…"

My back immediately stiffened. My name in that voice did things to my insides that I thought had long since passed. When I heard it again, this time followed by a groan, I knew who was on that couch.

Go back to your room, I told myself even as my feet started to turn. *Nothing good can come out of going to him.* But it was too late—my eyes had already zeroed in on the figure sprawled out on the couch.

From where I stood, Travis was nothing more than shadows and shapes. But his silhouette was one I would recognize anywhere. Booted feet attached to long legs, one that was hanging off the edge of the cushions he'd flopped face-first onto. His shirt had ridden up, showing off his tight-fitting pants, and the arm that had fallen down to the floor had the usual leather cuffs adorning his wrist and bulky rings on his fingers. His face was smashed into the leather, but his styled black hair was a dead giveaway, and as I got closer, I saw his dark lashes resting against his high cheeks.

I let out a sigh as I looked down at him and wondered if we would ever get back to a place where we could be in the same room and not argue. Or was this it? Did one of us have to be passed out for us to exist in peace?

It's be pretty sad if that was the case when at one time he'd been my best friend, the person I shared everything with. But Travis would never let it be that way again, he'd made that clear, and no matter how much I tried to keep things civil, he always pushed us into enemy territory.

Annoyed all over again about my current living situation, and the fact I had no choice about it, I cursed my inability to just walk away and leave him there to sleep off his idiotic behavior. I thought about getting him a glass of water and waking him to take some pills, but maybe a pounding headache would help drum some sense into him.

Instead, I grabbed a blanket out of one of the closets and came back to where he lay in the exact same position.

He'd done this to himself. Couldn't even get through one measly party with me close by. He'd had to go out, get shitfaced as usual, and stumble his way home.

I wasn't sure what that said about how we were going to coexist for the next twelve months, but if that was what it took for him to try to fool himself into thinking he hated me, let him. Seemed exhausting to me.

I bent down and spread the blanket over him, pulling it up under his chin. As he shifted, a loose strand of hair fell into his eyes, and just like that, I was back with my best friend…

TRAV:

Rhid oarty id sjit

It was the fifth message I'd gotten from Travis tonight, each progressively more incoherent. It took a minute, but I finally translated the jumbled mess into: This party is shit.

Guess there was no point in asking if he was having a good night. I didn't even know where he'd gone off to, since I'd had a date tonight, but if his messages were any indication, he was in need of some assistance. Were the other guys not with him?

There was no point writing back, since whatever response he managed would likely be even worse. I turned down the volume on the movie I'd been watching and hit call.

He answered on the third ring. "Caaaleeeb."

A blast of music assaulted my ears, and I pulled the phone away. "Where are you?"

"At a lambast—lame…ass party. Where are yooou?"

"It's two a.m. Where do you think?"

"Hmm. Jen's bed."

What? *"It was only a first date."*

"Aww, didn't go well?"

"It was fine, I just—" The sound of dry heaving had me sitting up in alarm. "Travis?"

He groaned, and that was it. I was tracking his ass down.

"Are any of the guys there?"

"Nooo."

"Tell me where you are. Or put someone on that can tell me."

He mumbled the name of a bar, and I shoved my shoes back on as I searched the address on my phone. Thank God Dad had gone to visit Vera on location for the weekend, or it would've been a lot more difficult to sneak out.

"Travis? I'm on my way. Okay?"

When he didn't answer, my pulse began to race. That none of our friends were there didn't sit right with me. What if something had happened, or, shit, what if he'd been drugged? What the hell was his sixteen-year-old ass doing at a college party anyway?

Ten minutes later, the taxi dropped me off at the corner, and I handed the driver a few bills. "I'll double it if you wait."

He narrowed his eyes then shrugged. "Need a smoke break anyway. You've got five."

I jumped out and ran toward the entrance, pausing only long enough to flash the fake ID Travis had given me. That thing was finally coming in handy, although maybe Travis wouldn't have gotten himself into this situation at all if he didn't have one.

What was I thinking? All Travis had to do was flash a smile at someone and they'd drop to their knees and do whatever he asked. It was something I both admired and hated about him, because damn if I could ever tell him no either.

I called his phone again, but this time he didn't pick up.

Shit.

I scrolled through my photos until I found one of him that I'd taken not long ago. He was always putting on a fashion show, showing off one of the many outfits he put together, and forced me to watch. Not that it was a hardship, considering he always made it entertaining, and gave me a reason to have an entire "Travis" album in my phone for moments just like this.

"Have you seen this guy?" I yelled out over the music to a group nearby, and when they all shook their heads, I made my way around the room. It was impossible that no one had seen him. Travis wasn't exactly a wallflower, and he was a million times better looking than most people, especially the ones in here. But every answer was the same until I climbed up to the DJ booth and held up Travis's picture. She didn't stop mixing as she glanced at it, then nodded toward a hallway.

God, what did he like about these places? It was hot and loud, and I had to push through too many bodies to count just to get across the room. This was so not my scene.

"Travis?" I pounded on one of the bathroom doors, only to jump back when it opened and a guy twice my size answered with a glare. After a glance behind him to make sure he wasn't holding Travis hostage, I moved on, peering into each of what looked like private VIP rooms.

Come on, where are you? *This was taking longer than I thought, and I doubted the taxi was still waiting.*

"Travis?" A velvet curtain hung across the entrance to the last room, and when I pulled it back, I saw a lone figure lying across the seating area. "Holy shit, Trav?"

He didn't stir as I ran over and shook him awake. One of his eyes opened, and when he saw it was me, he cracked a half-smile and lifted an

arm.

“Caaaleeeb. C’mere.”

A wave of relief ran through me, and I sank onto the couch beside him. “You ass.”

“Hmm?” His eyes closed again as his smile settled into something more teasing. “You wanna see it?”

“No, I want to get it home. Let’s go.” I pulled him up to a sitting position and then reached around to hold his waist. “Hold on to me so you don’t bust it.”

“Yes, Caleb,” he said, wrapping his arm loosely around my neck as I helped him stand. That was something. At least I wouldn’t have to carry his ass out of here. More like shuffle through the crowd and keep him from falling over.

I didn’t realize how claustrophobic it’d been inside until we stepped out into the cool night air and I managed a deep breath. Travis’s head fell against my shoulders, his nose skimming my neck.

“You smell good.” His breath tickled my skin, causing me to shiver as I scanned the cars for our taxi.

“Yeah, well, you smell like you had too many drinks and threw them up in that VIP room.”

“I do not. And I didn’t.”

“You sure about that?” I adjusted my hand on his waist and hauled him toward the taxi, where the driver was still enjoying a smoke by the hood of the car. He put the cigarette out on the sole of his shoe before climbing back inside.

When I opened the door to shove Travis in, he said, “He gonna be sick in my cab?”

“No.”

He grunted, but I didn’t care one way or another what he thought as long as he got us both home in one piece.

The second I slid into the back seat and slammed the door, Travis moaned, dropping his forehead to the back of the driver’s seat. “Don’t feel…so hot.”

“It’s okay, we’ll be home soon. Just breathe.” I went to rub his back like that would soothe him, but his shirt was soaked with sweat.

“Need to…lie down.”

The driver looked at me over his shoulder with a warning, and I waved him off. "Just get us there fast, please. Trav, come here."

I carefully pulled him down into my lap as we took off, trying to keep him steady so he didn't lose his stomach all over the floorboard—or on me.

"Try to relax, okay?"

"Imma relaxed."

I chuckled as he slurred his words together, his warm breath penetrating the material of my pants where his cheek was smushed up against my thigh.

"Good, won't be long now." I stroked his wild hair, drawing it back from his face so I could make sure he was breathing. But the second my hands touched the long strands, Travis let out a low groan and craned his head up.

"Feels good," he said. "Head's pounding. But that feels so goooood."

"Your head's going to feel a lot worse tomorrow."

He grunted in acknowledgment as I absently ran my fingers to the back of his head and gently massaged it, all the while watching the street signs and calculating just how much time it would take until we were home.

Not too much longer now.

If I could manage to keep him relaxed, we just might make it out of this cab without having to pay to have it detailed the next day. But that would depend a lot on Travis and how he was feeling.

"Trav? You still doing okay?"

When he didn't respond, I angled his face to make sure he was breathing, and thankfully he was, calm and even. He'd fallen asleep.

I let out a sigh and laid his head back down on my lap, trailing my fingers over his cheek and chin. He was doing this a lot more lately. Going out alone. Getting drunk. Calling me for a ride home.

I'd tried to ask him why he didn't just go out with his friends, but in true Travis form he always made some comment about how impossible it would be to hook up if he was busy talking to his friends.

Seemed like an irrelevant point to me, since he only hooked up with guys in clubs, never taking them home or leaving with anyone. Well, anyone except me after he'd gotten too drunk to call a cab.

"Why do you do this to yourself?" I whispered, studying the sharp angles of his face.

I didn't expect any kind of answer, he was off in la-la-alcohol-land, so when he muttered, "You were with Jen," my hand froze.

What did that mean? *He got drunk because I was on a date? No. That didn't make sense. Or maybe he meant he got drunk because I wasn't there to stop him. Yeah, well, he could try to blame me all that he wanted. But when he woke up tomorrow, I was going to hand him his ass.*

He needed to stop doing this to himself before he really got hurt. He was so much better than this. Better than the string of one-night stands he was working his way through. I just wished he could see it.

As the taxi took the final turn onto Park Avenue, I stroked his hair one last time, then leaned down by his ear and whispered, "We're home, Trav. It's time to wake up."

I BLINKED AND stared down at where my fingers were tangled in ink-black hair and froze.

Where the hell had that come from? I hadn't thought about that night in forever. Now here I was, a little over a week of living with Travis and stroking his damn hair.

He was such a menace to my mind, and even now, passed out on the couch, he was controlling my every thought.

I gently removed my hand, careful not to wake him, and as I slowly backed away I took a final look at the man who was still running around and living life like the sixteen-year-old I'd once known.

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ELEVEN

travis

“I THINK I’M tapped out.” I waved my hands as East tried to hand me another shot. I didn’t know how he was still upright after everything we’d consumed, but I was definitely more affected than he was. Maybe those rattlesnake shots were stronger than I thought.

“I thought we left all the pussies at home.” He dangled the small glass in front of my face. “You know. With Caleb.”

“Shut up.”

“Why? You want to forget him, don’t you? That’s why we’re here.”

He wasn’t wrong. I could’ve asked any of the guys to leave the party, but I’d chosen East, who was now determined to get me to the fuck-me-up level I’d requested.

Now that was a friend.

Before he could say another word, I reached for the shot and swallowed it back in one fiery gulp…

“FUUUCK ME.” I groaned, but the sound was muffled from my face being half smashed into the couch cushion. Jesus, had I not been able to make it to my bed last night?

I tried to remember how I’d gotten home, but everything after that last shot was fuzzy as hell, and the throbbing in my head wasn’t helping.

Every time I swore off a night with East, I went back for more, though this was the first time I’d ended up passed out on the couch. Hell, at least it was *mine* and not some random’s. That was something.

I didn’t have the energy to keep my eyes open as I did a mental check of my body. Head: attached but currently being attacked by a hammer, check. Stomach: slightly queasy but not at level head-in-a-toilet, check. Arms: would probably have feeling in both if I wasn’t lying on top of the left one, check.

All in all, not one of the worst hangovers I’d ever had, and nothing a few more hours of sleep wouldn’t fix.

As I shifted sides to give my arm a break, the blanket covering me slid onto the floor. I grabbed it and threw it back over me, snuggling down into its warmth.

Two seconds later, my eyes flew open.

Something about that wasn’t right. East had practically shoved me inside my condo before leaving—I remembered that now. I’d felt a wave of dizziness on the way to my room and had gone to sit on the couch and then just decided to lie down. I hadn’t even been able to kick off my shoes, much less get a blanket from somewhere, so where had it come from?

Through the battering ram smashing my head, I heard cabinet doors open and close, then the sound of running water, followed by heavy footsteps headed in my direction. I kept my eyes closed, hoping Caleb would ignore me and keep on moving, but then he slammed something down on the coffee table that rattled, and I jolted awake.

“Rise and shine.”

The bottle of pain reliever and a water mocked me, and I hitched the blanket up to cover my face. “Go away.”

“We’re gonna be late to school. Get your ass up.”

Ugh. School. I forgot it wasn’t the weekend. “Fuck off. I’m taking a sick day.” The gravel in my voice at least made it *sound* like I was sick, not that I needed an excuse.

“I don’t think so,” Caleb said firmly. “You’re the one who chose to drink down an entire bar, so you can deal with the consequences of feeling like ass.”

“Gee, thanks, Dad.” I burrowed down into the couch so he’d get a clue I didn’t plan on going anywhere, but suddenly the blanket was ripped off me.

I jerked upright, which sent a wave of pain through my head, and squinted up at Caleb. “What the hell?”

“You’ve got ten minutes.” He glanced at the time on his phone. “Make that nine.”

“I told you I’m not going—”

“I’m here to make sure I’m a good influence on you, remember?” I wanted to knock his smirk off with my fist. Once my arm woke up, anyway.

“Whatever. It’s not like I’m gonna tattle to Dick—”

“But I would.”

I stared up at the no-bullshit look on Caleb’s face and narrowed my eyes. “Did you cover me up last night?”

The question seemed to catch him off guard by the way he blinked several times before clamping his jaw tight. “No.”

I could see right through that lie, but the question was…why would he bother doing anything remotely decent for me?

“Yes, you did.”

Caleb glanced at his phone. “Eight minutes.”

Grunting, I popped the top off the pills and swallowed a few with the water I was surprised wasn’t something worse. Like vodka. Or vinegar.

Shuddering at the thought, I got to my feet slowly, and when the earth didn’t move, I figured it was safe to take a step. Then two.

“I don’t know why you’re trying to deny it,” I said. “I obviously didn’t put the blanket over myself.”

“Riiight. Because you were in such a clear mental state that you remember all the details.”

He had a point there, as much as I hated to admit it. I couldn’t picture Caleb giving a shit about whether or not I’d freeze, so…maybe I *was* imagining things.

Annoyed I’d even brought it up, I dropped the subject and headed into my room for the world’s quickest shower. That at least made me feel more alive, but Caleb yelling out, “Three minutes,” when I’d barely toweled off meant there wouldn’t be time to make sure I looked mind-blowing today. A pair of dark designer jeans and a hat to cover this mess of hair would have to suffice, but damn if I wouldn’t make grunging it out look good anyway.

I stormed out of my room, about to ask Caleb if he was happy, but all I saw was our front door swinging shut. That asshole had left without me.

Hiking my bag up my shoulder, I booked it outside to the elevators, and as Caleb looked over at me, the door slammed shut.

“Motherfucker.”

“Headache?”

“Nope.”

“You’re a shit liar.”

“Who says I’m lying?”

Caleb’s look was full of derision. “You’re trying to tell me your head doesn’t hurt right now?”

“I didn’t say that.” Because my entire *body* ached right now. Not just my head.

But before Caleb could argue his point further, the elevator door swished open and he stepped inside, taking a spot on the far left side of the car. That was fine by me. If he could stay out of my way for the rest of the day, week—hell, *year*—my life would be just peachy.

But Caleb, being Caleb, couldn’t ever do *anything I* wanted.

“So,” he said from his corner of our current cell. “Where’d you end up running away to last night?”

I looked up from where I’d been aimlessly scrolling through my socials and tried to channel my Dairiest scowl. “I didn’t *run* away.”

“No? I was positive it was your sorry ass I saw bolting for the exit through the smoke you left in your wake.”

I cocked my head to the side. He was so damn cocky up there on his pedestal, wasn’t he?

“You were lookin’ at my ass?”

Caleb opened his mouth as if to deny it, but then shrugged and did his best to keep his cool. “Was pretty hard not to, since you face-planted on our couch last night and didn’t move until I woke you up this morning.”

Interesting sidestep there. But even in my hungover state, I could see through *that* lie. I pushed off the wall and noticed the way his shoulders became rigid and he took a great interest in the doors of the elevator.

“You weren’t talking about this morning. You said when I bolted for the exit. That was last night.” Then, just to piss him off, I reached up and ran my finger along the band of his headphones where it was looped around his neck. “Were you checking me out, brother?”

Caleb turned his head until our noses were practically touching. “Stepbrother, and you’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

I wanted to deny it. Wanted to spit the lie out just to give him a taste of what it felt like to be rejected so quickly, so harshly. But I couldn’t get the

words out.

Instead, I did what I did best. I threw that shit right back at him.

“I’ve never been the one to deny it. That would be *you*. Something I see you’re sticking with even after looking at me longingly last night through the flames.”

“Longingly?” Caleb snorted and looked away. “I guess you could say that. I was longing for the day I could drag you through them.”

“Sure you were. But just so you know”—I leaned in and put my lips right by his ear—“I wasn’t the only one who noticed.”

The elevator dinged, saving Caleb from having to answer, but a flush crept up his neck regardless. He could try all he liked to deny the truth, but we both knew what it was. That was why things always got messy between us.

Caleb marched out of the elevator and through the foyer. If I didn’t know better, I’d think he was the one doing the running now. But I had a feeling it had more to do with wanting to be on time for class, since the last time he showed up to Livingston’s late, we were punished in the worst way *ever*.

“You don’t have to run, you know,” I said, even as I jogged to catch up with him. “Scotty is paid well to break speed limits and deliver us on Astor’s doorstep on time.”

Caleb screwed up his nose. “I’m not taking the Sprinter.”

“You’re so fucking stubborn.”

“And you’re delusional if you think I’m going to be trapped in a confined space with the seven of you.”

“Technically, it’s six now, since Preston pissed off and left me with you—”

“Even worse. He’s the only one I liked.”

“Liar. And would you slow the hell down?”

“No. Like you said, I’m going to need to find a taxi that’ll speed to get me there on time.”

As the valet pulled open the door for us, Caleb stepped out into the soaring porte cochère where the van waited for us with Scotty standing by the passenger door.

I reached for Caleb’s arm, drawing him to a halt. “You’re seriously going to get a taxi?”

“I’ve been getting one since I moved in.”

“Yeah, but that was before East threw you a welcome-back party.”

“Oh?” Caleb faked a look of concern. “How *rude* of me. Did I forget to tell you all fifty million times? I’m. Not. *Back*.”

He pulled his arm from mine, and as he walked over to the valet stand I stood there staring after his obstinate ass. If he wanted to climb in the back of some sweaty, germ-infested taxi cab to get to school instead of a luxury van, no skin off my nose.

“Trav? Is that you?”

I spun around to see West’s head poking out of the Sprinter, a shit-stirring smile on his face as I climbed inside and Scotty slammed the door behind me.

“What? You stare too hard at that Golden Boy of yours and go blind?”

“No.” He chuckled and pulled my hat off. “But you in this hat and no makeup had me doing a double take.”

I snatched it out of his hand and jammed it back on my head as East eyed me from across the van. “Yes, we were all a little confused for a second there. But then we saw you all but begging Caleb to look your way and clued in that it was you.”

I graced them all with the finger and a hearty “Fuck you,” which had them all laughing, then Scotty started up the engine. As he pulled out of the porte cochère, my eyes shifted to where Caleb stood waiting for his cab, and it took everything in me not to point out to each and every one of them that I wasn’t begging him to look now, was I?

But who was he looking at? Me. That’s who.

Because he could deny it all he wanted, but Caleb Reeves *was* back, and so were all of the messy, inconvenient feelings he always brought with him.

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TWELVE

caleb

JT HAD ALREADY commandeered our usual table in the library, his laptop and several random books he wasn't using littering the space to warn anyone off from joining. I sat down across from him, pushing aside a copy of *Modern Quantum Mechanics* to set up my own laptop.

"Physics, huh?" I chuckled, wondering where he'd pulled that from. "Did you change majors and forget to mention that?"

"Like the way you forgot to mention you were old friends with West and the others?" JT didn't look up from what he was typing.

Oh wow, okay. He wasn't gonna give me a pass for leaving out that little fact after all. I figured he would've gone in on me about it last night, but waiting to call me out when his boyfriend wasn't around was a much more JT thing to do.

"You're right," I said, nodding. "I should've told you, but it's not something I talk about. Or try to think about."

JT looked up, hurt lacing his brown eyes. "Don't you trust me?"

"That has nothing to do with it."

"Then why lie?"

"Eh…would we say *lie*?"

"Withholding information is lying."

I held my hands up. "It's complicated."

"You already said that last night."

"Still true."

JT stared at me over his laptop, and I felt the accusation. "When I met you, all I heard was to stay away from all of them, that they were bad

news—”

“They were. They are.”

“You acted like you hated them.”

“Still do.”

He shook his head full of brown curls, the ones that made him look so innocent. And maybe he still was, for now, even if he had a deviant for a boyfriend. “Well, apparently you’re one of them again, whether you like it or not.”

“Fuck. That.”

“You didn’t hear them last night? *‘Caleb, you’re back.’*”

“Dammit, I’m not back. I was forced into this situation, and you know it.” Frustration ate at me, and I rubbed at the furrow between my brows. One casual gathering on the roof didn’t mean shit other than we were going to have to learn to live with each other. The fact that it would probably be easier with them than with Travis definitely said…something. Nothing good.

JT shut his laptop and crossed his arms on top of it. “So talk to me. Tell me what happened so I understand where you’re coming from, because I have to tell you, right now my mind is blown.”

I snorted a derisive laugh. “Why, because I’m not Park Avenue Prince material?”

“No, because you are.” Before I could deny it, he added, “You were friends with them. Now you can’t stand them. Don’t you get why I’m a little confused over here?”

“Didn’t you ask West about it?”

“I’m asking *you* about it.”

A sigh escaped me as I lowered my hand and began to absently trace the wood grain patterns on the table. Considering JT was one of the only people I cared to spend time with, it was only right I let him in on what went down. Not *everything*, because there were only two people in this world that would ever know the real story. I’d go to my grave with that. But the rest…

I blew out a long breath. “Our parents got together when we were fourteen. My dad moved Travis and his mom into our place, and all of a sudden I was sharing my house with this stranger who was so different to me. I thought I would hate him. All I knew was that he’d done movies as a kid and only wore designer clothes, so I figured he’d be a pretentious asshole I wouldn’t have anything in common with.”

“But?”

“But what?”

“I hear a ‘but’ in there somewhere. Like he was all those things, *but* you thought he was cool anyway?”

He had no idea. Travis had blown into my life like a hurricane, and nothing had been the same since. “Something like that.”

“So…you were friends?”

“Yeah,” I said. “We were best friends. Up until our parents got married, we did everything together, and yeah, that included hanging out with his other friends. East was always the worst of them, but the rest could be a lot of fun back then.”

“Even Daire?”

I reached for the soda in my bag. “Nah, Daire wasn’t around. He didn’t join the group until after I left.”

“Oh. So *you* left. They didn’t kick you out?”

Good God, just spit it out already. “Long story short, Travis and I had a falling-out, and I decided to remove myself from the situation. He’s not exactly the type to make things easy when he doesn’t like you, and I didn’t wanna deal with all the backlash I knew I’d get, so…” I shrugged, like that hadn’t been a painful, confusing time in my life. “It was better to do my own thing and keep our lives separate.”

“By cutting off all your friends?”

“They were his friends first.”

“I’m sure they wouldn’t have chosen sides—”

“Then you don’t know them that well, do you?”

JT’s mouth snapped shut, and he swallowed. “Go on.”

“Needless to say, none of them took it well. If you’re not their friend, you’re nobody, so when Travis gave me shit, they followed his lead.” When JT paled, I added, “They didn’t hatch some crazy revenge plot or anything, don’t worry. More like we all just took to opposite sides of Manhattan and tried to keep it that way.”

“Damn. I’m sorry.”

“It is what it is. I just hate that the timing was so fucked, because I would’ve chosen to go to school somewhere else. But everything went down our senior year, and we’d all already been accepted to Astor. Our parents had gotten us condos at the Towers. I mean, it was all planned. Too late to change anything.”

“So you’ve been stuck having to see them all the time when you just wanted your own space.” He nodded slowly. “I get it.”

He got some of it, but definitely not *all* of it. But no one did. Not really. Travis and I had a complicated relationship, one that not everyone would understand, and I wasn’t quite ready to see if JT was one of them.

So while I was willing to open up about most of what happened back then, I definitely wasn’t giving all the details. Instead, I stuck to the easy ones. The ones that made sense.

“Yeah. That’s why my place in Soho was perfect. At least I had somewhere to escape to, but now—”

“That’s been taken away too.” JT grimaced. “Hard not to be resentful, huh?”

“Try impossible. Dad and Vera said it was because they wanted to downsize, but I can’t help but think I did something to piss them off, because my place was way cheaper than the Towers.”

“Did you ask them?”

I scoffed. “They said the Towers was closer to school and that I would be a good influence on Travis.”

JT clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle a chuckle. “Um, have they seen you two together?”

“Apparently that’s another thing. They want us to work out our differences.”

“By killing each other?”

“Don’t put ideas in my head.”

JT dropped his hand, shaking his head. “Wow. I mean, maybe it won’t be as bad as you think. What I mean is, you just moved in. Maybe in a couple of months things will be better.”

“You know, sometimes I envy your positivity.”

“Is that another way of saying my naiveté? Stupidity?”

“No, I mean it. I used to be like you. Always positive, always thinking things would turn out for the best—until they didn’t.”

A deep frown pulled between JT’s brows, and I almost felt guilty for my bluntness. But it was true. Travis and I had planned to have such a great time in college living together, finally being free of the parents, and one night had changed those plans forever.

“Caleb?”

“Huh?”

“I just asked if you and Travis have ever thought about forgiving each other.”

That would be a great idea. But it was pretty hard to ask for forgiveness when the other person refused to talk about it.

“That’s not going to happen.”

“Why not? You said you had a falling-out. Surely it wasn’t that bad it can’t be fixed.”

If only it was that easy. But Travis had made it clear over the years that he wasn’t interested in ever fixing us.

I shrugged, doing my best to play off how much that thought cut. “Sometimes things don’t work out the way we think they will, and that’s okay.”

“Is it?” JT’s eyes softened, and I looked back to my computer to avoid his sympathy. It was better not to go there. I couldn’t let my defenses down, not now that I had to go home to Travis, it was too dangerous.

“Yeah.” I grinned, but I knew JT wasn’t buying it. “Don’t worry, I promise not to suffocate him in his sleep.”

“It’s not Travis I’m worried about.”

“Well, don’t worry about me either. I’ve been dealing with these guys a lot longer than you, Golden Boy.” I winked at him. “I can look after myself.”

“Fair enough. But if you ever want to talk to me about it—”

“Or talk shit about them?”

He laughed. “That too. I’m here. We were friends first, and that means something to me.”

Even if it doesn’t to Travis… I didn’t miss his meaning. “Thanks. So, we good?”

“We’re good. Now would you stop talking to me? I’ve got work to do.”

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THIRTEEN

caleb

AS THE SUN finally disappeared for the day, night crept in through the windows of the condo, bathing it in lights and shadows from the city outside. It was always an interesting juxtaposition to be looking out at the bustling streets from up here and be met with nothing but silence.

I had the place to myself. Travis was never one to do something as mundane as stay home on a school night and study. So I took the opportunity to leave my bedroom and venture out to the living area to set up for the next few hours.

With my French press and mug, I chose a seat at the dining table that was never used and clicked open on the first of several sociology links our professor had given us to research for our upcoming essay, and winced at the length of the paper.

I couldn't wait to be done with school and do something I actually enjoyed. This course was a mandatory one for my degree, but the sooner I could get it over with and focus on photography only, the better.

Although learning about the consequences of human behavior was something I probably could stand to have a few lessons in, since I was constantly trying to understand the reason Travis was the way he was.

I reached for the French press and poured myself a cup of coffee, and had settled in to read the mind-numbing paper when the door to our condo swung open and laughter spilled in to my silent space.

Great. This was exactly what I'd been hoping to avoid tonight. Another go-around with Travis and one—or several—of his crowd.

They didn’t need a degree to know that their future was set for them, and technically I didn’t either, I supposed, but unlike them, I *wanted* one. I knew how lucky I was, but I didn’t want to just skate by on the trust fund Dad had put aside for me. He and Vera had taught me and Travis better than that. We’d been taught to understand our privilege. To be humble, not a Mr. Braggerton about it unlike some people I knew, who along the way had led Travis down the path of self-indulgence.

I wanted to work. I wanted a career, and the quickest way to do that was to graduate.

Something I *wouldn’t* be able to do with Travis and his yahoo friends invading my study space every night. I was about to tell them just that when Travis stepped out of the foyer and into the main living area, hand in hand with a man.

There was something familiar about the guy trailing after Travis in a fuzzy, off-the-shoulder purple sweater and low skinny jeans. I just couldn’t pinpoint what.

I sat still as a statue as they made their way into the kitchen, my pulse pounding as I tried to think of a way out of this, and quick, because right now they were completely oblivious to my presence—which, knowing Travis, meant they would probably have each other’s clothes off in the next few minutes.

“So…” Travis turned around to face his plaything, the lights from outside illuminating his teasing smirk. Damn he looked good. I hated that I even noticed how attractive he was when he wasn’t glaring, and it had my dick jerking unexpectedly between my legs.

The fuck?

That was unwanted.

One appreciative look at Travis and now I was hard up for him?

“You up for a drink, or…” Travis trailed off.

“Mmm, definitely *or*.”

Oh, for fuck’s sake. If the floor could just open up and swallow me whole, that would be great—preferably before this guy swallowed Travis whole.

“Well, that’s easy enough.”

“And so am I.”

Travis chuckled, and the sound seemed to vibrate through me, making my wayward cock throb harder—a reaction that was out of left field. It was

like I'd been possessed, or taken over by some outside force, because there was no way I was sitting here watching Travis flirting with some random and getting hard.

"You shouldn't tell me things like that," Travis said. "I might take advantage."

"Might?" Mr. Easy teased. "What should I say then to make sure you *will*?"

Damn it. I needed to get out of here. But with Mr. Easy walking backward out of the kitchen and luring Travis away from alcohol with the promise of a whole different kind of buzz, it seemed my fate was sealed.

Why didn't I just get up the second I heard the door open? It would've been way less conspicuous than standing up now, when the two of them were in the process of getting their freak on.

Mr. Easy moved into the center of the living room directly opposite me, and I'd never wished for a quick and early death as hard as I did right then.

He smoothed his hands over Travis's chest where his shimmering leopard-print shirt was unbuttoned.

"You know, I wasn't sure I'd hear from you again after the welcome party."

Ooh, shit.

That was where I knew him from. He was the crop top guy who'd been glued to Travis on the dance floor that night, his leg twined around Travis's like climbing ivy—not that I'd been looking.

"Been a little bit busy," Travis told him. "But I'm all yours right now."

I gripped the handle of my coffee mug a bit tighter as Crop Top moved in close to rock his hips against Travis's.

"I can feel that," he said, grinding a little harder. Travis thrust forward, a low growl rumbling out of him, and I…

…spilled my damn coffee all over my laptop.

"Fuck."

Travis and his date's heads whipped in my direction as I sprang up from my seat and grabbed the hoodie I'd tossed over the end of the table.

"Caleb?"

I vigorously wiped down my keyboard, hoping like hell the table was covering up my body's inconvenient response to Travis.

"Caleb?" he said again, stopping on the other side of the table, and I glared at him.

“Who the hell else would it be?”

“Jesus, don’t bite my head off. I’m not the one who spilled your coffee.”

No, he wasn’t. But he was the reason I was hard right now, and for that, he could fuck right off.

“Hi, I’m Kirby.”

My eyes shifted over Travis’s broad shoulder to where Crop—*Kirby* stood smiling brightly. So brightly his teeth practically lit up the space.

“Hey.” I slammed my computer shut and scooped it up. “I was just leaving.”

“Now why would you want to do that?” Travis said. “The place is big enough for the three of us.”

I decided the best thing for me to do was get the hell out of there. I went to reach for the French press, but like Travis could read my mind, he went for it at the same time, and when our fingers touched, I immediately let it go.

“Stay.” His blue eyes held mine, daring me. But I wasn’t playing that game.

“Nah, it’s cool. I don’t want to get in the way.”

“Oh?” He glanced back at Kirby, who waggled his brows, then back to me. “What if we *want* you to get in the way?”

Okay, that was it. “Give me the press, Travis.”

“Oh, come on, Caleb.” He chuckled. “Hang out with us for a while.”

The invitation was innocent enough, but the slight tilt to his lips was anything but.

“How long you been studying?”

“Not long enough.” I held my hand out, gesturing to the French press. “But now I have to make more coffee.”

“What if I make the coffee? Would you stay then?”

“Yeah,” Kirby chimed in, not knowing the mine field he’d just ventured into. “Don’t let us run you off.”

This was getting ridiculous. But I finally caved, figuring it was the easiest way. I could stay over here, away from them, then maybe Travis would leave me alone.

“Fine, whatever. But I need to work.”

“We won’t get in your way.” Travis drew a lazy cross over his heart. “Promise.”

Like I believed that. But there was no going back now, so I put my computer on the table and made my way into the kitchen, hoping they would leave me alone.

“Hey, Kirby?” Travis said. “Why don’t you go find us something to watch? I’ll be there in a second.”

“Okay.”

After a quick kiss to his lips, Kirby all but skipped back to the couch, and I rolled my eyes. It was clear Lady Luck wasn’t on my side tonight as Travis followed me into the kitchen and leaned against the counter, relaxed in leather pants that fit him in all the right places.

Something I never would’ve paid attention to before tonight, this very moment, when my dick seemed to have a mind of its own.

I wanted to strangle him.

“Need any help?”

“No.” I grabbed the coffee beans out of the cabinet and poured some into the grinder before plugging it back in.

“Okay. Well, could you make me one, then?”

I looked over my shoulder, and when he grinned, I scowled.

“Is that a no?”

Instead of answering, I pressed the button on the grinder and let the loud whirring answer for me.

“Fine. I know when I’m not wanted… Which, by the way, isn’t anywhere in this house tonight. Jeans feeling a little tighter than usual, Caleb?”

Of course he’d noticed—he had a radar for that kind of shit. “Why don’t you go back to your *date*?”

“Oh, I am.” Travis pushed off the counter and walked over, not stopping until his front brushed against my back. “But you might want to grab a mug with a top this time. I’d hate you to see something that had you spilling your coffee again.”

He chuckled as he walked out of the kitchen, and I cursed my stupid cock.

God, he was such an agitator. Totally got off on it. He couldn’t even give up the chance to get one up on me when he had a sure thing waiting for him on the couch.

I would give it ten minutes. Hell, maybe five. Then I was out.

Back at the table, I opened my computer and made sure to keep my eyes glued to the screen and not on the pair practically sitting on top of each other in the other part of the room. Several pages in and the sound of the TV was no longer hiding the sounds of Kirby, as Travis did God knew what to him on the couch.

But I wasn't going to look. That was what Travis *wanted*.

If I didn't know better, I'd think it was the reason he'd brought Kirby back here in the first place. Travis didn't usually invite guys back to his bed. He was more a "sneak out the next morning" kind of guy. So it was hard not to think that this little show was for my benefit. To show me what a hotshot player he was.

Newsflash, asshole, I already knew that.

But that didn't mean I wanted to sit here and watch. It wasn't that I was a prude, but I was trying to fucking work over here, and they were getting progressively louder.

I shifted in my seat, trying to focus on the work in front of me and *not* the ache between my legs, but my eyes kept losing track of where I was. Then Kirby moaned and I was done. I wasn't going to sit here and listen to them have sex several feet away from me.

As quietly as I could, I closed my laptop and glanced over at the couch to make sure I hadn't attracted any unwanted attention.

That was a mistake.

Travis had Kirby beneath him now, stretched out on his back along the cushions as he nuzzled into his neck and kissed a path back up to his mouth. Their hands were tangled up in each other's hair, much like their legs were further down the couch.

Look away. Go *away.*

But I stayed frozen as I watched, swallowing hard when Kirby's leg wrapped around Travis's ass to hold him there. Travis lifted up onto his elbows, looking down at his conquest with a hunger that made my stomach flip and my mind rewind to a time when Travis had looked at me that way…

"Caleb…" Travis pushed my hair out of my eyes, and the intensity that flared when our gazes locked was like nothing I'd ever felt. I sucked in a breath as my cock reacted to the way he was looking at me—the way he'd always *looked at me, but I'd never understood the context before. Not until*

his fingers tightened in my hair, and an urgent need began to pulse between us—

A curse ripped out of Kirby, bringing me back to the present, and I didn't want to know what Travis had done to elicit that reaction. Whatever it was, Kirby was gripping the back of Travis's neck and pulling his mouth down, as another flash of memory dragged me back in time…

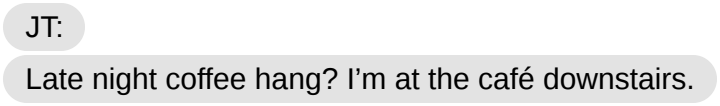
I thought I was dreaming, but it was really happening. Travis was kissing me. Kissing and touching me in a way that I never could have imagined, and the shock made my heart stutter and another gasp escape my lips. The ones currently molded against Travis's like they'd been made to fit there.

It felt so good, so right, that I didn't even question it, didn't even think as his tongue slipped inside my mouth…

"Yeah, just like that." The sound of Travis praising Kirby had me snapping back to reality, as he sat up to straddle him and began to roll his hips.

Oh God. I was gonna be sick.

Before I could grab my shit to head to my room, a message flashed up on my phone.



Fuuuck yes. His timing couldn't have been better.

I slid my chair back, no longer giving a shit about being quiet, and ignored that I saw Travis's head turn in my direction out of the corner of my eye. Whatever. I didn't want him to think I was affected by what was going on in any way, because he could do what the fuck he wanted. Same as me. I just hoped he didn't catch what was still happening below my hips, because the last thing I needed was for him to think I was somehow turned on by the sexual display happening only feet away.

And those memories could fuck right off too.

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FOURTEEN

travis

PENT-UP SEXUAL FRUSTRATION. There was nothing like it.

The second Caleb left the apartment last night, my dick deflated, no longer interested in the man writhing beneath me. I tried to blame it on Caleb's being a distraction, and his negative vibe threw me off my game, but in the back of my mind, I knew why I'd brought Kirby around. I was just that petty. And once the object of my attention was gone, I casually pushed Kirby away and ended up sitting through the entirety of *Deadpool* before he finally got the hint things weren't gonna go down that way between us.

Fucking Caleb. Such a goddamn cockblock.

Without an outlet for my irritation, I headed out the next night to an old club favorite with the others, determined to get out of my bad mood. Showing off one of my new designs always gave me a confidence boost, and this one in particular accentuated my body in such a way that I'd leave them all gagging.

Preston let out a low whistle as I sauntered up to the bar. "Damn, Trav. On the prowl or meeting someone?"

"Can't a guy just look good?"

"Well, yeah, but there's good and then there's…wow."

I smirked, not sure I'd ever get over that our former "straight" guy of the group had no problem checking out guys now. "Stop it, you're turning me on."

He chuckled and lifted a shoulder. "Just being honest. Serena would die if she saw you. I should send her a picture."

“You should. She has impeccable taste…other than dating you,” I teased with a wink. “How is your boyfriend’s daughter these days?”

“Obsessed with Europe. I have a feeling she’ll stay after her internship.”

“You don’t think your moving in with Archer has anything to do with that decision?”

“No, I think the rotation of hot bodies she’s been hanging out with over there have more to do with it.”

“Can’t say I blame her.” I glanced over my shoulder at the sea of bodies gyrating against one another on the dance floor. “Some fresh meat would be nice.”

“Or you could try staying with one person longer than a night and not run out of perspective—”

“Wieners?” East said as he sidled up beside Preston.

“Seriously?” Preston chuckled. “Can we stop talking about meat? I’m getting hungry.”

“Careful,” East warned with a sly grin. “Daddy Filth isn’t here to feed you.”

“Jealous?”

“I am,” I admitted as I flagged down the bartender. “I’d let Archer feed me anything he wanted to. Even if I’m still holding a grudge.”

East screwed his nose up. “Not me. Men that age are too high-handed. They think they own you.”

Preston didn’t look at all upset by the comment. In fact, his smile grew smug.

“And that’s a problem because?” I asked.

“Because no one will ever own me.”

I snorted. “That’s because no one could afford you.”

“Exactly. So why even entertain the notion? It’s a pointless exercise, and I don’t believe in wasting my time. It’s valuable.”

“Could you be more of a snob?”

“Probably.” East looked at the bartender who’d just stopped in front of us. “Beluga Noble to our VIP, and don’t make me ask for top-offs.”

East looked back down the bar and arched a brow. “How’s that?”

Pretty fucking impressive, I had to admit, since a bottle of Beluga Noble ran at close to $10K. “Excessive?”

“So perfect, then.”

We headed back to our VIP lounge on the other side of the dance floor, and other club-goers automatically moved out of the way for us. That was nothing new—our group attracted attention wherever we went, which was why we were usually at the top of every invite list when it came to a new club, restaurant, or bar opening in New York.

If they wanted to get attention, have their place go viral, they made sure to get in touch with one of the Park Avenue Princes.

Did we like the name? Not at first. But as the years passed and the gossip magazines and online tabloids referred to us that way, it kind of stuck, and it was accurate. We all came from affluent families and we all lived on Park Avenue. Couldn't fault the logic there, even if it was kind of *douchey*, as Caleb used to say.

Ugh, *Caleb.* At least he wouldn't be here tonight. The last thing I needed was another night of cockblocking—

I went still as my eyes landed on the VIP area, where the rest of our crowd was gathered.

What the hell was Caleb doing here?

I grabbed East by the elbow and jerked him to a stop. "Did you do this?"

He followed my gaze to the VIP. "Well, well, well. For someone who claims he doesn't want anything to do with us, he makes a habit of showing up lately, doesn't he?" East raised a brow as I dropped my hold on him. "I wonder why."

"To drive me fucking crazy," I muttered, clenching my fingers into a fist at my side.

"Seems he's everywhere you are, doesn't it? Here. At home. Sitting by you in class."

In my goddamn head, I added.

"It's an interesting choice."

"Is it? You're the one who threw him a fuckin' party."

"Oh, that's right." East's nonchalant tone hid the undercurrent of mischief I knew was simmering. "What do you plan to do about it?"

I watched as Caleb took a glass of clear liquid from the server passing out drinks, surprised it wasn't his usual brew. JT sat beside him, sandwiched between Caleb and West, whipping his head back and forth to talk to each of them, because it was obvious his boyfriend and best friend weren't on the best of terms.

The last thing I'd expected was a Caleb appearance tonight, and it rattled me to the point I could only stare. He'd even foregone his usual jeans for a pair of camel-colored pants and a fitted long-sleeve white shirt that hugged the lean muscles in his back and shoulders.

And those arms…

East snapped his fingers in front of my face, and I tore my eyes away from Caleb. "Jesus, what?"

"Another second and you'd have drool falling down your chin." East wrinkled his nose. "I asked what you're planning to do about your little problem."

"I…" Fighting the urge to look back at Caleb, I turned my back on him to focus on East. "I don't know anymore. What do you think?"

"I think you should ask Van."

Considering Donovan was the one we all went to with our shit, the one who gave actual advice instead of whatever popped into his head, it was probably the smart thing to do. But I wasn't looking for logical—I was looking for fucked up.

"I don't want to talk to Van about feelings, for Christ's sake, that's why I'm asking you."

"That's hurtful. I have feelings. I just don't remember where I left them."

"Good, leave them somewhere else and help me. What would you do if you couldn't escape someone? If he was just…everywhere and you couldn't breathe?"

Without hesitating, East said, "I'd drown them."

"What?"

"You can't breathe, so they can't breathe—"

"You're a real eye-for-an-eye guy, you know that?"

"I had to be growing up with my father." He shrugged. "But if you really want to take back your space, show him who's boss."

"And just how am I going to do that? It's not like he listens to me."

"Who said anything about listening?"

I narrowed my eyes, confused.

"In case you didn't notice, Caleb can't keep his eyes off you."

"Yeah, okay."

"*Yeah. Okay*. It's true. It's always been true. Even when we were in high school. But back then he could hide behind being friends with you. Now it's

just this strange hate-eye-fuck thing he does that really is kind of hot, but at the same time screams of self-repression, and I'm not sure you have the patience for that."

"What the hell are you talking about? I wanted ideas that were fucked up. Not ones I'd need to go to a therapist to decipher."

East rolled his eyes. "I'm getting there, grasshopper. Breathe."

"That's the problem, remember? I can't."

"So reclaim your space."

"Huh?"

"Take back your space. He's everywhere, right?"

"Right?"

"So, you need to kick him out. Metaphorically, of course. Your parents would probably disown you if you did that for real."

I rubbed a hand over my face and let out a sigh. Shit, maybe I should've gone to Donovan.

"So do you have any brilliant ideas on how I'm supposed to do this?"

"Yes." East's lips twitched.

"You gonna enlighten me, or—"

"You need to fuck someone in front of him."

That was the last thing I'd expected to come out of East's mouth. It shouldn't have been, since topnotch fuckery was the reason I'd come to him in the first place. But *actual* fuckery as a way to cleanse Caleb from my mind?

I mean, it wasn't the worst idea, and considering the way Caleb had reacted when I brought Kirby home last night, it just might work.

Plus, it'd kill two birds with one stone. I was horny as hell, had been since my dick had called it quits and taken a swan dive of epic proportions. And I would scare Caleb off permanently.

This plan was fucking *genius*.

"I see the wheels turning."

"Uh huh. This plan of yours, it just might work."

"Guaranteed. Once he sees you in your element—and trust me, you'd be hard to miss with how you're dressed tonight—he'll get the message."

"Which was what again?"

East let out a sigh as if to say, *Keep up, would you?* "That he doesn't rule your thoughts or own your space. That you're the same sexy man-

whore we all know and love. Now, if you need more of a pep talk than that, I'm out. I left my pom-poms at home."

I snorted. "Nah, this is perfect. Exactly what I needed. Though I'd pay good money to see you wave some pom-poms around."

East brushed off his shoulder. "Yes, well, I wouldn't get your hopes up about that. Now come on. They've probably already finished off the first bottle."

As he headed toward the VIP, I stayed back and smoothed a hand down my top. "Actually, I'm going to take your advice and… How did Preston put it? Prowl around a bit. Find some trouble to get into."

"Or someone." He shot me a wink before leaving me to it, and as he stepped past the velvet rope, Caleb glanced up. His brow knitted together as he leaned forward to look past East, as if he'd expected someone else to be with him.

Me, perhaps?

As if he felt me watching, Caleb scanned the room, and when his eyes connected with mine, my cock jerked. All I ever wanted was that man's attention, and when I had it, it did things to my body I'd never get to make reality.

Because the truth was, he wasn't looking for me because he wanted me. He was looking to make sure I didn't come around and ruin his night.

Wait for it… I thought, the corner of my mouth tipping up as I gave him a two-finger salute and disappeared into the crowd to live up to my reputation and man-whore around Manhattan.

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FIFTEEN

caleb

“ANOTHER?” THE SERVER keeping the group topped up reached for my glass, but I shook my head. I was still working on the first round, and it was hard enough to get that down. Vodka wasn’t my thing. This *club* wasn’t my thing, yet here I was.

Why? I’d been asking myself since JT had called with the invite. Why say yes?

Because if I didn’t go, they’d drag me out or harass me until I *did* go. At least this way, it was on my own terms. I could make an appearance, then dip out.

And speaking of dipping out… Travis hadn’t even bothered joining his friends tonight, and I knew I was the reason for that.

Not being on the other end of his glares or taunts should’ve filled me with relief, but all I could think about was where he’d disappeared to. What he was doing. Who he was doing it with. Why we’d never been able to get past something that had happened long ago, and how it was I still let him infiltrate my thoughts.

“Oh come on, waste some more of East’s money.” West gestured for the server to refill my glass anyway, finishing off the bottle as he poured the last of it.

“That wasn’t necessary,” I said, setting the drink on the round table in front of us.

“Lighten up, Reeves. No one’s out to get you. Not even if you get a little tipsy.”

JT nudged me with his elbow, giving me a reassuring smile until East dropped into the seat across from us.

He nodded at my full glass. “Refusing my good booze?”

“Not looking to get shitfaced with you.”

“Why not? It always made you fun.” A devilish smile curved his lips. “Oh wait. That was tequila. I can make that happen too.”

He gestured for the server to come back, and I shook my head. “No. Absolutely not.”

“Let me guess. You haven’t had tequila in years, and that’s why you’ve become such a bore.”

“Shut up, East,” JT said.

“What? It’s why he sought you out, after all. Bores have to stick together.”

West flicked his finger over the top of his glass, sending a spray of vodka in East’s direction. “Shut up, East.”

East took a napkin from the server’s tray and dabbed it over his cheek. “I see immaturity is rubbing off from your little Golden Boy.”

“Immaturity?” JT scoffed. “This coming from someone who tattooed penises on other humans?”

East’s eyes turned deadly. “Other humans who fucked with Gavin, in case you forgot. I wasn’t holding the tattoo gun, but trust me, I could’ve done worse.”

I didn’t need confirmation that East had been the one to orchestrate a takedown of Gavin’s ex-boyfriend months ago, since it was exactly the kind of thing that screamed revenge from this group, but considering I’d heard horrible stories about that ex, this might’ve been one instance where it was justified. I’d never admit that to him, though.

I reached for my glass, readying myself for the terrible taste of vodka, and took a long swallow that made me cringe.

“And you.” East turned his attention to me. “You’ve run off my last single partner in crime. How dare you.”

“Like I have control over what Travis does or doesn’t do.”

He exchanged a glance with West, and whatever that look meant, I didn’t want to know. Whatever issues Travis and I had weren’t anyone else’s concern.

“Tell you what.” I set my drink down and stood up. “I’m out. So let your partner in crime know it’s safe to come back now.”

I pushed past East's knees blocking my path as JT called out after me not to go, but I'd had enough. It had been stupid to even come here. Especially after what happened last night.

As I headed for the exit, I saw a sign for the restrooms and decided to make a stop, since there was no telling how long the commute back uptown would be.

"Is this the line?" I asked several guys standing in the hallway, and when they nodded, I joined the tail end.

Somewhere, Travis's phone was probably going off, telling him the coast was clear and I'd peaced out. Then he'd be able to party it up or do whatever it was he did now when I wasn't around. The thought was almost scary, considering what he did when I *was* around.

My thoughts drifted back to last night, the nonstop PDA show with Kirby, the way my traitorous body had reacted to seeing it, and I couldn't help but wonder if I'd said yes to tonight's invite just to prove to myself that what had happened was an unwanted response to his overt sexual behavior.

But one look at Travis tonight and I realized what a mistake I'd made. He was on the hunt, that was clear by the way he was dressed, and the last thing I wanted was to watch him catch someone in front of me…again.

I looked up the line to see if I'd made any progress. It seemed to have barely moved, and I figured something *else* had to be going on inside the restrooms. Guys' lines never took this long.

Resigning myself to being there for a few more minutes, I scanned the club while I waited, watching the crowd on the main dance floor bump and grind.

That was what I should probably do—hit the dance floor, find some gorgeous girl, and forget all about my asshole roommate. It was bad enough I had to live with him, but was I really going to let him run me off from having a good time? I was only weeks into this year from hell our parents had decided to inflict upon us. I'd be damned if I suffered while he went on with his life like nothing had changed.

A familiar laugh caught my attention, dragging it to a smaller, more intimate dance floor to the left. The lights were low over there, and the velvet walls were designed for comfort—if couples wanted "support" in bumping and grinding *minus* a few articles of clothing.

It wasn't my scene at all, but as the shadows shimmered over the entangled bodies, a very familiar silhouette came into focus and my breath

caught in the back of my throat.

Travis was difficult to miss in the outfit he'd chosen tonight: fitted black pants that flared at the bottom and sat indecently low on his hips, his usual assortment of cuffs that went up his arm, rings that adorned several fingers, and a couple of chains hanging from his neck. But it was the cut of his contoured vest, dipping to mid-chest and leaving his back bare and on display, that was the real showstopper.

My eyes got stuck on his back as he danced, and just like the night before, my body immediately responded.

This was exactly what I'd been hoping wouldn't happen. I stood there in some sort of trance, and my cock decided to come to life.

Travis had his hands braced on the wall on either side of his captive's head. Wandering hands were running over his ass and pulling him in close, making it clear that whoever was between him and the wall was very happy to be there.

I knew I needed to look away, *get* away from where I had a perfect view of them, but my feet seemed glued to the floor. My eyes fixated on the scene unfolding in front of me.

Walk away. Just walk the fuck away.

But just like last night, I found my body unwilling to follow my brain's orders. It was like he'd put a spell on me, a voodoo curse where he could make my body do what he wanted, because that was the only possible explanation for why I was hard right now.

Travis lowered his head, and I watched him kiss his way down his partner's neck. It was like I could feel his lips on my own skin, and I had to reach down to adjust my pants, which were growing tighter by the second.

Unbelievable. I was standing here in a club full of potential hookups and my dick was hyper-focused on a person already hooking up. Not to mention a person I didn't want to be hard for. But no matter how much I tried to convince myself of that fact, I was still standing here watching him.

Maybe that was it. Did I just like to watch?

Travis wedged a leg between the other guy's and began to rock against him, and I tightened my grip on myself, remembering how good it felt to be pressed up against Travis's writhing body.

"Hey, move out of the way, man."

The annoyed voice pulled me from my thoughts, and I stepped aside, closer to the smaller dance floor. I zeroed in on Travis again, only this time,

he was watching *me*, looking over his shoulder as his partner kissed his way down his chest.

It was as though he didn't even notice. His slow, knowing smile mocked me as his gaze traveled down my body, catching on the way even the shadows couldn't hide my tented pants.

Goddammit. I should've just left. I shouldn't have stopped and risked running into him. Now he had confirmation of just how much he affected me, and I hated giving up that power to him. It tipped the scales, not giving me a fucking foot to land on.

Why did this keep happening? I wasn't into guys. I wasn't into Travis. I let my guard down *once*, and he'd never let me forget it.

He bit down on his lip suggestively, then pushed off the wall. Grabbing the front of the guy's shirt, he turned them both around so Travis's back was against the wall, giving him a prime view of where I stood. The guy's hands roamed Travis's body, his hips swaying as he slinked his way down, but Travis was still staring at me.

With one hand holding the guy's head down at his hips, he curled a finger at me, beckoning me to come closer.

Was he insane? No way was I getting in the middle of whatever was going on. Even if he didn't already have someone to supply his next orgasm, I still wouldn't have walked over there.

But I also wasn't looking away. It was like I was hypnotized, something in Travis's hooded eyes keeping me rooted to the spot. When it was clear I wasn't joining him, he threaded his fingers through the guy's hair, keeping him down near his hips as he thrust them forward. Sucking his bottom lip behind his teeth with every slow roll. The sight made my cock ache to the point of my being desperate for release.

God he was…

I swallowed, not letting my mind go there. Travis was a sexual creature and used it to his advantage, and this was just a way to prove a point.

As the guy made his way back up Travis's body, it was as if I was the one over there, feeling how hard he was. I remembered how good it felt, how shocked I was to feel Travis's erection rubbing against mine. It'd been years since I let myself think about that. The aftermath had ruined that entire night, made me feel like I'd done something wrong.

But it'd been Travis who made the first move, even if I'd been staring at his mouth, wondering what it would feel like under mine. For a moment, I

thought we both wanted the same thing, until my brain came back online and I realized I'd just come with my stepbrother.

It was wrong. Standing here like a voyeur was wrong.

So when Travis cocked his head and mouthed, "Come here," some sense of reality finally kicked in, and I did the only thing I could think of.

I ran.

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SIXTEEN

travis

CALEB REEVES AND his stubborn ass were going to be the death of me.

If I had to stand here and watch him deny his body's blatant reaction to me one more fucking time, I was going to explode.

"Gotta go." I slipped out from beneath the arms of… Shit, I hadn't actually caught his name, but it didn't matter. East's not-so-brilliant hookup idea was the last thing on my mind as I watched Caleb retreat down the hallway.

This is the problem. One look at Caleb and you're back where you started.

"Piss off," I muttered, ignoring the warnings and red flags as I closed in behind the man trying to leave.

Look at that. He's leaving you. *He wants nothing to do with* you.

Close enough now to touch, I reached for his elbow and pulled him into an empty nook off the hallway, taking him by surprise. He jerked himself out of my grasp, but the second I pushed him up against the wall and he saw it was me, he went still.

Fuck, he was so damn gorgeous, even with the confusion radiating off him that fused with desire so tangible I wanted to reach out and take it. Did he want me to? Or did he just like to watch?

I took a step closer but kept from pressing my body against his the way I wanted to. For now. I couldn't promise my patience would last very long, but he was already spooked by what he was feeling, that much was obvious.

"Caleb," I said. "Where you goin' so fast?"

He swallowed, his eyes dropping to my lips. “Go. Please, just go. I’m leaving.”

“Because of me?”

Caleb’s breaths were unsteady, but he managed to scoff. “Get over yourself.”

“Why would I do that?” I placed a hand on the wall by his head and leaned in by his ear. “When you get hard every time you watch me. Last night… Tonight…”

“No…”

I knocked his foot aside, spreading his legs so I could slip one of mine between them. The second I closed the space between our hips and felt how hard he still was, a strangled curse ripped from my throat.

“No? So this isn’t for me?” I shifted to rub against his erection, and his eyes slammed shut. “It sure feels like it is.”

“Does it matter? Yours isn’t for me.”

Was that an admission? It sure felt like one, but with his eyes shut, it was difficult to tell.

I lowered my head again, and when my breath whispered over his ear, his body went as stiff as his cock. “Now, we both know that’s not true.”

Caleb’s eyes flicked open. “Do we? You seem to be putting it in a different person each night lately.”

“And that bothers you?”

“That…” Caleb trailed off as he lowered his gaze to where my hips were pressed up against his. “That tracks with you. You’ve never been able to keep your dick in your pants.”

This was too fucking sweet. Caleb was *jealous*.

“Been keeping track of that, have you?”

“Pretty hard not to when you keep taking it out in front of me.”

“I’d say you’re pretty hard for me whether I take it out or not.” I tilted my head to the side, daring him to argue. “But aren’t you tired?”

“Tired?”

“Of fighting this.”

Caleb swallowed, but other than that he didn’t move a muscle.

“It’s been how many years?” I asked, sliding my leg up the inside of his. “And you’re still trying to act like *this*”—I rubbed my thigh against his balls, and Caleb’s hands clenched at his sides—“isn’t for me.”

“It’s just a reaction.”

“Mhmm.” I leaned in. “A reaction to *me*.”

Caleb licked at his lower lip, and our faces were so close I almost felt his tongue. But no, I wouldn’t do that, not until he asked or maybe begged.

I’d made the first move that night years ago, and I’d be damned if I did it again.

“What was it that did it?” I drew the back of my fingers down his bicep, and Caleb shivered. “The way I touched them? Did it remind you of that night?

Caleb’s eyes darkened, his breathing uneven now as I let my fingers on the wall find his hair and gently play with the stands.

“Or maybe it was the way I pushed their hair back, the way I did with yours, wanting to see your face right before I kissed you?” I ran my eyes over his flushed cheeks. “You had the same red cheeks that night as you do right now.”

“Travis…” Caleb’s voice was deeper now, arousal making it hotter, grittier, sexier. “You need to—”

“What? Stop?” I raised a brow. “Tell me to, and I will.”

The beat of the music throbbed in the distance, making the ache between my thighs intensify. Or maybe that was just the way Caleb looked seconds away from pouncing.

“Or I can put us both out of our misery and touch you.” When my mouth barely brushed his jaw, he trembled. “Kiss you…”

I lowered my hand to his waist, wanting to feel his bare skin under my palm, but settling for holding him any way I could get him. And to my surprise, he didn’t push me away. It only made me bolder, and I rocked my hips against his, slowly at first to see if his body would respond, and then with more pressure, teasing his cock to come and play with mine. He moaned, dropping his head against the wall, and then I felt his fingers wrap around my forearm, holding tight like he was going to wrench my hand off his waist.

But that didn’t happen. He thrust his hips forward to stroke mine and match my pace, and *fuuuck*. I didn’t know if all the blood rushing to my dick was going to make me pass out or come in my goddamn pants.

I slid my hand down his waist to the curve of his ass, getting a nice handful of him as I hauled him against me. The friction of our cocks, his hot breath on my neck, the scent of his soap and cologne filling my lungs on every breath… It was overwhelming. Perfect. So fucking hot I couldn’t

believe this was really happening, that the soft grunts coming from Caleb weren't just my imagination.

I needed more, and I didn't care where we were. He was finally giving in, and nothing was going to ruin this.

"Kiss me." I grazed my teeth along his jaw and reached down between us, unable to stop myself from stroking him. His dick pulsed, thick and hard and heavy in my palm, making my mouth water with the need to taste him.

Fucking kiss me.

I pulled back, giving him the chance to make his move.

Do it.

I teased the head of his cock through his pants, and the dam burst. A growl reverberated from Caleb's chest seconds before he clenched my top in his fist and jerked me forward. My mouth landed on his before I could take a breath, but the instant I realized what he'd just done, I snapped out of my surprise and took control.

Sweet, sinful lips opened under mine, and I nipped at them, needing a quick taste before I dove in. Caleb grunted as I thrust my tongue deep inside.

The fingers on my forearm tightened, and when he pulled my hand even harder against his body and pumped his hips forward, I groaned with pleasure.

Had I died and gone to heaven? Or did I pass out somewhere after drinking myself into a coma? Because there was no way in hell Caleb was fucking my hand, was there?

I swept my tongue around the hot interior of his mouth, memorizing the taste of him. He was just as potent as I remembered.

God, why did it have to be him that made me lose my damn mind? One taste and I was ready to get on my knees and beg him to be mine forever. But Caleb was nowhere near that with me. Hell, he probably didn't even realize what he was doing right now, just that it felt really fucking good.

He'd flattened his hand over my heart now, stroking up the bare skin of my chest as he sucked on my tongue like he'd never get the chance again. The real kicker? He could do that whenever he wanted—all he had to do was ask.

"Caleb," I whispered against his mouth as I kissed my way up his jaw to his ear. "Let me touch you."

His head fell back against the wall, a moan leaving him as his fingers dug into the skin under his palm.

“Let me make you feel good. Let me give you what you want.”

And yeah there I went, begging.

Caleb lifted his head off the wall, his eyes finding mine, and as I squeezed his cock, about to follow through, his fingers tightened, halting me.

Fuck. I knew that look. It was the same look he’d given me the night of our parents’ wedding. The one that told me he was confused as shit about what he’d just done, and even more confused that he’d liked it.

But before I could say anything, he pushed me back a step and snatched his hand away. He blinked those gorgeous, dark eyes as though trying to focus and touched his fingers to his lips.

Then, before I could get a word out, he slipped out of the nook and started off in the direction of the doors. I made a move to follow, but as if he sensed I wouldn’t be letting him get away that easy, he stopped and turned back to me, holding up a hand.

“Don’t.”

One word. That’s all it took to stop me in my tracks as I watched him disappear through the crowded dance floor and head home.

To *our* home.

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SEVENTEEN

caleb

IT WAS OFFICIAL: I was the stupidest person alive.

I couldn't believe what I'd done, what I'd let happen. Giving in to Travis shifted our whole reality. My mind was full of questions I couldn't answer.

Why had I kissed him back?

Why did my body react the way it did around him?

Why couldn't I stop fucking *thinking* about him?

I couldn't even chalk it up to being drunk. I'd made out with Travis, in public, stone-cold sober. That wasn't me. My body must've been hijacked, because none of this made sense.

So after obsessing over the situation all night and during classes the next day, I did the only thing I could think of: I asked out the girl who'd been making eyes at me since the semester started.

My motives were usually a lot more straightforward with a potential hookup, but this time I felt a bit of guilt at the fact that I needed her to get my mind off Travis. I needed to remind my traitorous body who it was really hot for, and that wasn't my fucking *stepbrother*.

"This was fun. I was wondering if you'd ever ask me out." Bronwyn looked up at me under long, curled lashes as I held the door open for her. She stepped out of the restaurant and onto the sidewalk, and her eyes told me she wasn't ready for the night to be over. She just wanted me to say the words.

This was what I wanted. To take her home, lose myself inside her, and prove to Travis that what happened between us was nothing. Less than

nothing—it was a fluke.

I was straight. I wasn't interested in his dick or anyone else's. And I definitely wasn't into *him*.

TRAVIS:
You didn't have to run away…

The text Travis had sent when I left the club played in my head over and over again, driving me out of my mind and solidifying my decision.

I reached for Bronwyn's hand, and she took it eagerly. "Wanna come back to my place?"

"I'd love to."

There. That was easy enough. But why did my stomach suddenly feel like it was twisted into a ball of knots? There was a high possibility Travis wouldn't even be home. He wasn't exactly a homebody, and it was about that time the guys would be heading out.

I couldn't decide what the better scenario would be. If I got Bronwyn home and Travis wasn't there, then this would all have been for nothing, right?

But that wasn't true. I wasn't only doing this to prove a point to him. I was also proving one to myself. I needed tonight. I needed to lose myself in long hair, soft skin, and shy lips. Maybe then I'd stop being haunted by hard muscles and bold hands. Possessive kisses and sinful promises.

"Caleb?"

"I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I was just wondering how far it is to your place."

"Oh." I smiled as we turned onto Park Avenue. "Just a couple of blocks. I live at the, um, Waldorf Towers." *God that feels pretentious to say.*

But apparently pretentious worked just fine for Bronwyn. Her eyes lit up, a surprised little laugh escaping her. "The Towers?"

"Uh, yeah."

"I've never been there before. Or even stayed at the hotel. I did go to a bar there once, I think." Then her grin grew wider, as if something just occurred to her. "Isn't that where those um, prince guys live?"

Oh, for fuck's sake. I couldn't escape Travis and those morons even when they weren't around. "Yeah. I, uh, live with Travis. He's my

stepbrother."

Actually, that was perfect, exactly what I needed to do—put Travis back in the box he belonged in. The one with the family connection.

Talk about that. Think about that.

Don't *think about how he was rubbing his erection against you last night. And definitely don't think about how hard it made you.*

"Oh, I didn't know that."

I wasn't surprised. It wasn't like Travis and I went around advertising the fact, and up until recently I didn't give him or his friends the time of day.

"Yep. Lucky me, huh?" I tried for a laugh that sounded strained to my ears, but she didn't seem to notice as we reached the entrance to the Towers and the doorman opened the door for us.

"Good evening, Mr. Reeves."

"It's Caleb," I said for what felt like the hundredth time to the older man, but just like his younger counterpart in the mornings, he insisted on using formalities, making me feel like they were talking to my dad.

"Yes, Mr. Reeves. Have a good night."

Bronwyn giggled at the exchange as I led her across the lobby to the elevators, and soon enough we were at my floor.

The scent of her perfume or shampoo found me as she passed me and stepped out of the elevator. I welcomed the distraction from the headier, more masculine scent I hadn't been able to erase from my mind since last night, feeling as though Travis had laced it with some sort of addictive quality.

"This place is insane. That elevator…" She shook her head. If you weren't accustomed to places like the Towers, then it was like stepping into a whole new world, which was why people begged for the invite to East and West's parties. People wanted to see how the one percent lived.

"This is me," I said, opening the door to the condo, unsure of what I wanted to find waiting for us. But as soon as we stepped inside, the sound of the TV let me know Travis was home.

My stomach flipped, those knots tightening as I took Bronwyn's hand and led her out of the foyer, and like a moth to a flame, my eyes immediately found him.

Travis was sitting on the couch, his long legs stretched out in front of him on the coffee table. He wore a pair of loose grey sweats that looked

comfy, and his black t-shirt was tight enough to show off the body that had pressed me up against the club wall last night.

Not that I remembered—much.

“Someone doesn’t answer his texts,” Travis called out, but when I didn’t answer, he rolled his head on the tall cushion to look over at me. His eyes went immediately to Bronwyn before meeting mine, and a small smile played at his lips. “Ah, I see.”

Bronwyn nudged me, and I swallowed a sigh.

“Bronwyn, this is Travis. Travis, Bronwyn.”

“Hi.” She grinned, and just like that, Travis turned on the charm.

“Aren’t you a looker.” He propped his chin on his arm. “And what pretty blonde hair you have.”

His dig at me set my teeth on edge, but she blushed.

“Make sure my guy treats you right.” He winked at her, and I took her hand, leading her to my room and flipping Travis off when her back was turned.

His answering laugh echoed down the hall, and I was grateful to shut my door and block him out.

Well, that got his attention, even if I wasn’t sure my message had been received the way I wanted.

Bronwyn set her purse on my desk and walked over to the window. “Wow, what a view.”

“Yeah, it’s not bad.” I shoved my hands in my pockets, suddenly feeling awkward now that it was just the two of us. But this was what I wanted. She was hot, she was interested, and God knew I needed a night to forget and just feel.

“So.” She turned around and leaned against the wall, putting her curvy body on display. “You gonna stand over there all night?”

Pushing down my unease, I strode forward and let my eyes trail down her body. Her blonde hair cascaded down over her full breasts, and the minidress she wore made her tanned legs look a mile long.

Think about those wrapping around you. Imagine lowering that top a few inches and taking her into your mouth—

A knock on the door interrupted my perusal. What the hell did *he* want? To join in? “Fuck off.”

Bronwyn smirked and moved off the wall as he knocked again. This time, I yanked open the door.

“What?”

Travis held up a bottle of lube in one hand and a handful of condoms in the other. “I wanted to make sure you’re stocked and ready to go.”

I scowled at his smartass face. “I’ve got it under control.”

“Well, I just know how hard up you’ve been lately.” He grinned. “You can never be too prepared. Especially with such a sexy body waiting—”

“Thank you, Travis.” I slammed the door in his face and locked it.

“He’s…helpful.” Bronwyn twirled her hair between her fingers and moved in close. “I’m impressed he thought you’d need so many. That bodes well for me…”

Shit, my cock wasn’t exactly responding yet, and now I needed to go all night? Had this turned into a spectacularly bad idea?

No. She was here because I wanted her to be.

I reached for her waist and pulled her in close. As my hands roamed over her body, she arched into me and lifted her chin. Even with sky-high heels on, she barely came up to my shoulders, and I had to bend down to give her the kiss she was all but begging for.

Her pouty lips met mine, but they were slick with a thick gloss that tasted faintly like strawberries. I couldn’t get a feel for her skin through the layers, and it caused a slippery slide that might’ve worked for lubing my cock, but it wasn’t doing shit to get me riled up.

Oh so casually, I moved away from her lips and kissed down her neck, leaving trails of gloss down her skin to wipe it off mine.

She practically purred, gently running her nails over my abs as she tilted her head to the side to give me better access. Closing my eyes, I tried to get into it, but Travis knocked on my door *again*.

“One sec.” Annoyance and relief warred inside me as I unlocked the door and threw it open. “Is our place on fire, or do you need something?”

“Nooo, but you might.” Travis held up a pair of handcuffs. “I got these last week and thought I’d share.”

He was fucking ridiculous.

“Bronwyn, give us a minute, would you?” I shoved Travis out of the doorway and shut the door behind me. God he was a pain in the ass. “Are you insane?” I hissed, glaring at the self-satisfied expression on his face.

“Nope.” Travis slipped one of his hands into his pocket, and my eyes automatically followed the move. Something he didn’t miss, judging by his

low chuckle. “Quite sane, actually, and rather brilliant, if I do say so myself.”

The twinkle in his eyes made me grip the door handle a little tighter. He was up to something. “Brilliant?”

“Mhmm.” Travis took a step forward, closing the distance between us. “You see, I wanted you out here with me, and here you are. So my plan worked brilliantly.”

I narrowed my eyes, realizing what a monumentally bad idea this had been. What had I been thinking bringing a girl back here? There was no way to teach Travis a lesson. No way to one-up him when it came to using sex to make a point.

“You really think you can just take what you want, don’t you?”

Travis’s eyes lowered to my mouth, and he licked his lips. “If that was the case, I’d be a lot less frustrated right now.”

I shook my head. I was the one orchestrating things tonight, not him. But then he took a step forward, and my back met with the door.

“What are you trying to prove in there? That last night didn’t happen? That you’re straight?”

All of that. But I wouldn’t confess my confusion to him. Not when he’d just throw it right back in my face.

Travis put a hand up on the doorframe, and I was immediately thrust back into the club last night—the empty nook, the dark shadows, the electrifying feelings that coursed through me when he moved in close, and my dick kicked behind the zipper of my pants.

Fuck. Of course it decides to come to life now.

“I’m not trying to prove anything.”

What a crock of shit that was, and judging by the smirk that hit Travis’s lips, he knew it.

“Uh huh, sure. Nice lip gloss, by the way. Cherry or strawberry?” I turned my head, about to tell him to fuck off, but he whispered across my lips, “Or maybe I should just lick it off and find out for myself.”

I trembled at the threat, and I wasn’t sure if it was from fear or desire—maybe a bit of both. I didn’t want this. But apparently my body had other ideas, because *now* my erection was standing tall.

“Send her home.”

“What?”

“Send her home,” he said again, then shifted until our bodies were flush. “I can give you what you want.”

I shook my head. But Travis wasn’t buying it, probably because my dick was trying to start a fire with his.

“All you have to do is say the words. It’s that easy.”

“You mean *you* are.” If I’d thought that would hurt his feelings, I was in for disappointment.

“For you, I’d be *so* fucking easy. Tell me you don’t want that. Tell me you haven’t imagined what I’d do to you.”

This was getting me nowhere fast. I’d come out here to tell Travis to get lost, and now I was thinking about all the things he might do with that indecent mouth.

“Still not sure?” he said, taking a step back and running his eyes down my body. “That’s cool. I’m going to go have a shower and, uh, take care of this.”

He reached down and rubbed the thick bulge in his sweatpants, and the ache between my legs intensified.

“You should take that back to your girl in there. But Caleb?”

“What?” I muttered, annoyed at him and myself.

“Just remember who gave it to you.”

He winked and turned on his bare feet, and I knew there was no way I’d be taking anything back to Bronwyn. Not when the only thing I’d be able to think about was Travis naked in the shower, getting himself off to me.

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EIGHTEEN

travis

IF CALEB'S MOOD was any indication, he didn't get the happy ending he was hoping for last night.

Waking up to slamming cabinet doors had been fun, but before I could tell him to simmer down, he'd already left for Astor.

If anyone should be pissy, it should be me, considering I'd had to get off in my hand and not a hot body. It wasn't the outcome I preferred, but at least alone I was able to picture who I wanted when my orgasm spiked—didn't have to fake it or wish I'd been deep inside someone else.

Had Caleb pictured my face when he came last night? Was that why he was giving Daire a run for his money in the scowling department?

Hell, I'd done him a favor. A simple thank you would've sufficed.

As I waited for the elevator doors to close after a long school day, I heard a familiar voice say, "Hold the door."

As I stuck my foot out to block the sensor, Caleb slipped inside, his bag falling off his shoulder. When he looked up and realized it was me he'd be sharing the confined space with, his face fell.

Not exactly a look that made me all warm and fuzzy.

I moved my booted foot from the door, letting them fall closed, and the air immediately grew thick with tension.

"You don't look happy to see me," I said, leaning back casually against the wall. He looked wound too tight, his back stiff, his jaw clenched. "I thought I'd be the reason you'd be feeling pretty damn good today."

He looked everywhere but at me.

"No need to be embarrassed—"

“I’m not.”

“You sure about that?” I leaned to the right to get in his sightline, but he dropped his chin, clearly in avoidance mode. “Did you not have a good time last night?”

“None of your business.”

“Isn’t it?” No scratch marks on his arms from the wicked nails Bronwyn sported. No hickeys on the smooth skin of his neck. His full lips didn’t look any more swollen than usual. Any of those things would’ve been evidence of a fun night between the sheets. “So, how was she? I didn’t hear any ‘Oh Caleb’ last night, but maybe she’s more the silent type. She did look a little…sweet.”

Caleb pinned me with a glacial stare.

I grinned. “What? I’m not allowed to ask?”

The elevator doors opened, and Caleb shot out of them like his ass was on fire. Chuckling, I sauntered into the hall after him.

“You know, you’re not acting like someone who had hot sex last night.”

He stopped in front of our condo, reaching into his pockets for his key card and coming up short. “Shit.”

“Let me.” I moved in beside him, brushing up against his arm as I scanned my card. The second it unlocked, he burst through the door. The speed at which he was trying to get away from me was amusing, if not a little insulting. “Damn, you got another hot date tonight?”

“Leave it, Travis,” he said, dropping his bag on the floor and heading to the kitchen, where he pulled the fridge open and grabbed a beer.

Whatever was bothering him, it was clear he had a solution—drink his problems away. I could get on board with that. I was a master at drowning my sorrows in a bottle. But those horrible beers were not going to get the job done.

I tossed my bag on one of the barstools and eyed the colorful label on the bottle he had a death grip on.

“If you want to get drunk, you’re going to need more than the four of those you have in there.”

“Who said I want to get drunk?”

“You usually head straight for a beer after school?”

Caleb eyed me across the kitchen counter. “I was thirsty.”

“I mean, if you want to drink, go for it. But let me make you something better than that.” I rounded the end of the counter and as I moved into his

space, Caleb sidestepped me.

“I don’t need you to do anything for me, *thanks*.”

Surly Caleb was in the house, and he was barely keeping a lid on his temper. Interesting that he was even trying—usually he’d tell me to fuck off and be done with it. But for some reason he was avoiding the confrontation he so desperately wanted to have.

That wasn’t going to work for me. Something was happening here. Something I’d been waiting years for, and I’d be damned if I let him slam the door shut right after I’d kicked it open.

I leaned back on the counter and eyed him where he stood as rigid as one of the King’s Guard.

“So, uh, what’s going on with you today?”

Caleb glared at me and brought the beer to his lips, taking a long gulp.

“Do you want me to guess?” When that still didn’t get a response, I added, “Because I have to warn you, some of my guesses might piss you off.”

Caleb’s eyes narrowed a fraction, and he downed the rest of his beer. Then he put the bottle down and went to leave the kitchen.

I called out, “What happened? Your cock not as good at faking it as your brain is?”

It was a low blow, I knew. But it was the only way I knew I’d get a reaction—and boy did I.

Caleb whirled around, his jaw clenched almost as tight as his fists as he stormed back over to the counter. “You know what? Fuck you.”

A thrill of victory skated up my spine at the flames I caught flickering in his eyes, and my cock jerked. He looked like he wanted to incinerate me right there on the spot, and I wasn’t sure what it said about me that I was turned on by that.

I moved to the other side of the counter. “I mean, if that’s what you want.”

Caleb’s mouth fell open, and I couldn’t help my smirk.

“What? Would you rather receive? ’Cause I’m open to that too.” When he just stood there, I walked around the end of the counter and stopped by his side. “Maybe that’s the problem. She couldn’t give you what you wanted.”

Caleb turned his head until our faces were only inches apart. “I don’t have a problem.”

“Hmm,” I sucked my lower lip behind my teeth and when his eyes lowered to the move, I took a step back. “See, I think you’re wrong.”

“Oh really? Because you’re *so* fucking wise.”

“About this, I am.”

Caleb tracked me as I walked backward to the living room. “And what exactly is *this*?”

When I reached the couch, I undid the button of my pants, eyes locked with his. “Sex.”

Caleb scoffed but stayed focused on me, seemingly unable to look away. “Of course it is. Everything with you leads back to sex.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

He shook his head, but didn’t make a move to leave.

“It’s really not a big deal,” I said, reaching up to unbutton my shirt. “We all do it. We all wanna feel good.” I let the shirt fall off my shoulders and onto the floor. “Don’t you want me to make you feel good, Caleb? You know I will.”

“That’s not gonna happen.”

“It should.”

“It won’t.”

Wanting to keep his attention, I lowered my zipper and backed up until my legs hit the edge of the leather cushion. “I know you like to watch. Maybe this will…inspire you.”

Caleb glanced in the direction of his room, like he was thinking about making a run for it, but then he looked back at me. I’d slipped my hand inside the confines of my boxer briefs and gave myself a rough stroke before freeing my cock.

His lips parted and he sucked in a breath. Had he thought I was just teasing? That I didn’t really want this?

“When did you…” He swallowed, his eyes caught on my dick. “You didn’t have that…”

“Last time?” I slid my fist down to the plump head and fingered the Prince Albert piercing. “No, I didn’t. Want to try it out?”

“Travis.”

“It’s okay to be curious. Just be curious with me.”

“I’m not—”

“Your body gives you away.” I nodded at the outline of his cock rising to the occasion and felt a supreme sense of satisfaction that I had that effect

on him.

“I don’t want it to.”

“Why? Because I’m a guy?”

“Because you’re my stepbrother.”

That was the admission I’d been waiting for, the one I never thought he’d actually say out loud.

I resumed the slow slide of my fist along my growing erection, not letting that deter me. “We are in name. Not by blood.”

“Does it matter?”

“Yeah. It does. Especially if that’s what’s stopping you from taking what you want.”

Caleb let out a long exhale as he scrubbed a hand over his face. “Like you know anything about what I want.”

I knew a *little* something about that. If it was anything like the hunger I felt just thinking about him, he had to be going out of his mind with need.

“You want me,” I said. “And you can have me. I’m giving you the permission you won’t give yourself.”

A pained look crossed his face.

“Tell you what.” I pushed my pants and briefs down my hips a little and sat on the chair. “I’ll stay right here. I won’t touch you unless you ask me to.”

When Caleb didn’t make a move to leave, I pressed a little further.

“Do me a favor and take your shirt off.”

“What? Why?”

“Because you’re fucking gorgeous and you make my dick hard, that’s why.”

I couldn’t believe I was still able to surprise him after all this time, but he seemed to be at least considering my request.

Hell, I would’ve settled for him watching me, but getting him to take his clothes off was a serious perk.

He toyed with the edge of his shirt, and I sank back into the chair, spitting into my hand to lube myself.

“Just the shirt?”

My dick lurched in my hand at the question, and when I nodded, Caleb pulled it up and over his head. He was about to drop it on the floor when I gestured for it.

“Give it here.”

Caleb looked at the shirt, then back to me. “Why?”

Yeah, you dirty slutbag, why?

“Don’t want to make a mess on the couch.” It was a bullshit answer. But I wasn’t going to confess to wanting to smell him and rub something of his all over me. This was practical, and hopefully he was too far gone to think about it.

Caleb frowned but, bless his confused heart, tossed it at me. “You get it dirty, you wash it.”

Or sleep with it under my pillow for the rest of my life. “Deal.”

I gripped the material in one hand as I continued to pump my dick nice and slow, feasting on the body I’d fantasized about more than I could possibly remember as Caleb stood in front of me topless. He was more built than I remembered, the muscles of his chest more defined but still not bulky. His skin was smooth, with a light dusting of hair that darkened in a teasing trail from his navel down into his jeans.

“Damn, Caleb.”

“What?” He was so fucking oblivious when it came to his appeal. He could have anyone he wanted—I should know, I’d watched them throw themselves at him for years—but he just stayed under the radar. The quiet, good guy with the heart of gold.

But it was time to see if I could make the quiet guy get a little loud.

“That was a compliment.” I licked my lips. “I’m not the only one who’s changed since that night.”

“I don’t look any different.”

“You look fucking ripped. I want to run my tongue over your abs.”

Caleb’s eyes widened, and I chuckled.

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep my tongue to myself for now.”

Caleb reached down and ran the heel of his palm down his agitated cock.

“But tell me, did you like it when I put it in your mouth?”

“Jesus, Travis.”

“That’s not an answer.”

He took in a deep breath. “I didn’t hate it.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere.” And if he kept looking at me like that, we’d get there really fucking quick. “Do you want to do it again?”

“I’m not answering that.”

“So yes.”

“I *said* I wasn’t answering that.”

“Okay, fine. When did you start thinking about this again?”

“This?”

I tightened my fingers around my cock. “You really want me to say it? Because I will.”

“No, I—” Caleb sat in the clubman chair behind him. “The night you brought Crop Top—*Kirby* home.”

So that night hadn’t just been frustrating for me. Good to know.

“Want to know a secret?”

Caleb rubbed a hand over his face and blew out a breath. “Probably not.”

“I didn’t fuck him.”

Suspicion clouded Caleb’s eyes, but also a hint of satisfaction. “Why not?”

I squeezed myself a little harder at his question. “Because he wasn’t the one I wanted. Kind of like Bronwyn wasn’t the one *you* wanted.”

Caleb looked down at my pumping fist, shaking his head. “You shouldn’t say things like that. This is—”

“Exactly the way it’s meant to be. You, me, it’s always been us.”

“Always fighting…”

“Just another kind of heat, that’s all.” I brushed my thumb over the sticky head of my dick. “You know that.”

Caleb shifted in his seat, dipping his hand between his legs to adjust himself, but it was no use. His dick was as hard as mine, and probably causing a mess inside his jeans. But was it my fault he was stubborn?

“You know, a good way to find out if your dick is broken is to use it.” I eyed the hand between his legs, and he brought it up to flip me off. “I’m serious. Feel free to unzip and check it’s all working if you like.”

“And give you a free show in the process?”

“You give me one, and I’ll give you one.”

“You’re already giving me one.”

I’d give him even more if he said the words, but I had a feeling this was as far as he was willing to go. He was still busy trying to wrap his head around the fact he was turned on by a guy sitting across from him and jacking off.

His eyes on me was enough to keep my dick hard, though. Hell, the fantasy of that was enough. But having the reality staring at the way I was

fingering my piercing and pumping my dick through my fist was making any kind of restraint close to impossible.

“You could always leave if you don’t like it.”

Caleb raised his gaze, and his blown pupils confirmed that he liked what I was doing. So I kept going.

I leaned my head back on the couch and started to really work myself, rough strokes from base to tip, using my pre-cum as lube.

Caleb moved in his chair, sliding a little further down it and spreading his legs wide, apparently happy for the talking to be done—or maybe just happy that I’d stopped asking the hard questions.

Either way, the only sounds in the room now were his breathing matching pace with mine and the slip and slide of my hand up and down my cock.

I gripped the shirt he’d tossed me a little harder, jealous it had been touching his bare skin earlier. When I brought it up under my nose and inhaled, Caleb sucked in a breath.

Now you get it. If I can’t touch you, I’m going to get as close to you as I can the only way I can.

I took in another deep breath, drawing in the scent of his soap and cologne, and my balls began to tingle.

It’d always been like this with Caleb. A look, a slight touch, the smell of his soap, and I was ready to go. It was one of the reasons I hadn’t allowed myself to be around him after that horrible night—I didn’t trust myself, and I knew he wasn’t interested.

But now…

His eyes were hooded as they took in my overtly sexual display. But there was no anger there anymore. His full lips were slightly parted and slick where he’d worried them with his tongue.

I wanted them slick with the pre-cum dripping down my hand.

God, I’d fucking pay for that privilege, to see him down on his knees with my dick sliding in and out of his mouth. Or between my legs with his head buried over my cock. I’d start slow, run my fingers through all of that thick brown hair and hold him in place as I thrust in and out of his mouth.

“Fuck.” The curse ripped out of me unexpectedly. “Lick your lips for me.”

I could see the question forming in his mind, but instead of asking it, he licked his bottom lip, as requested.

My hips snapped up as I imagined him swiping that tongue over my cock. I pictured him opening wide and letting me slide in.

“You’re imagining fucking my mouth right now, aren’t you?”

“Yes…” My chest rose and fell as I pumped even harder. “And I’m imagining you letting me.”

“Travis…”

“You wouldn’t be able to talk,” I said. “Just groan. I’d grip your hair and hold you still as I make you taste me.”

“Jesus.” Caleb began to stroke over the denim strangling his dick.

“I’d want to come in your mouth, or maybe all down your chest. Then when you put this back on”—I brought his shirt down to my flushed cock and stroked—“you’d also smell like me.”

I began to fuck into his shirt, the ideas I’d just voiced running rampant in my head as I looked at the object of my desire sitting only feet away from me, now rubbing himself.

Then he said, “I love how you smell.”

And that was it.

My balls tightened and my toes curled as Caleb’s name tore from my lips. Then I exploded in a fierce rush, spraying cum all over his shirt as I pumped every last drop of myself onto the soft fabric.

It was one of the most powerful orgasms I’d ever had, and that I’d had it in front of Caleb was no surprise. After all, he’d been the star in every one of my sexual fantasies since we met.

When my breathing calmed, I glanced across and noticed a wet spot in the jeans he’d refused to take off. I couldn’t help my smirk as I raised my eyes to his, happy to report back to him, “I guess it’s not broken after all.”

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NINETEEN

caleb

HOW THE HELL was I supposed to sleep? I'd been lying there for hours, sheets twisted from tossing and turning, unable to shut my brain off—so many thoughts, so many emotions, that I was having a hard time sifting through them all.

Hard. Now that's a laugh.

Watching Travis get himself off to me had been so hot I'd come in my fucking jeans. The guy, he had no filter. His actions, his words, they all dripped with sex, and hearing him talk about wanting to fuck my mouth…?

Damn. I couldn't deny the attraction at this point. It was obvious there was something about Travis that drew me in, that made me want to do more than just look at him or fight with him. Seeing him touch himself, knowing I was the one to make him explode like that, was an ego boost like no other. At least, that was what part of me said.

The other side, the rational part of my brain, told me I wasn't anything special. Travis could get an erection when the wind blew. I knew what kind of guy he was, that he enjoyed sex and had probably had more partners than I could fathom, so what was I? A challenge? The one person he could never get, and that made him want me even more?

So that was my appeal, then. I was the stepbrother he shouldn't touch.

Then what the hell was I doing thinking about him, reliving the kisses that never should've happened in the first place? Wondering what it would be like to feel his hands on me again? Nothing had ever felt that good, and admitting it to myself sent a wave of panic flooding through me.

This was why it'd been safer to steer clear of Travis all these years. It was easier to ignore him, forget him, hate him.

Fuck, why had I ever given in? If I hadn't kissed him back all those years ago, if I hadn't been curious about what it would be like, then we never would've gotten to this point.

Then again, I wasn't the one who'd ruined our friendship by acting like a jerk. For so long I'd run through the events of that night and the aftermath, trying to pinpoint what had happened to make Travis flip the way he had.

I wanted to ask him, to get it all out in the open, but doing that might make things worse. And I couldn't handle any more tension with Travis.

As I rolled onto my side, trying to find a comfortable position, which was proving impossible, I forced myself to dive back into the past one more time.

OH MY GOD. Oh my God. Oh my God. *I scrambled to my feet, stuffing my cock back in my boxer briefs. The evidence was all over my hands, though —my cum, wrung from Travis's talented fingers.*

What have I done? *I stared down at Travis lying on the Persian rug, his boxer briefs down his thighs, his spent dick in his hand, and broke into a cold sweat.*

"Caleb—" he started, rising to a sitting position, but I didn't want him coming any closer.

I stumbled back, suddenly unable to breathe, desperately needing some air. Everything had just happened so fast that I couldn't process it, and all I could think to do was put some distance between us.

I'd fully intended on going up to my room, but somehow I ended up in the guest bathroom, falling back against the door, slamming it shut.

Closing my eyes, I dropped my head back and took in a few massive gulps of air. The suffocating feeling finally eased, but it did nothing to calm my racing pulse.

It's fine, everything is fine. It's just Travis. Just your best friend. We were drinking and took things a little too far, that's all.

We'd look back on this and laugh about it later. Hey, remember that one time…

I rubbed the dull ache in my chest and focused on breathing and not hyperventilating over the fact that I'd just made out and gotten off with my

new stepbrother. Our parents had only been married for a matter of hours, and this *was how we'd chosen to celebrate? We were out of our goddamn minds. Years of being inseparable flipped on its head because we had a wild night.*

I took in a deep breath then pushed off the door. The sight that greeted me in the mirror was a shock, and I flipped on the light.

My shirt unbuttoned up my chest but not completely open. Just enough that Travis had slipped his hands underneath, feeling his way around, exploring before trailing down to the waist of my boxer briefs. My cum—or his?—was smeared across my lower stomach and all over the front of the black material.

I stepped toward the sink, my first instinct to wash away all the proof of what we'd just done. But something stopped me.

I unbuttoned the rest of my shirt and tossed it aside. Then I touched my stomach, the same place Travis had touched minutes ago, before sliding my hand further down and brushing the sticky mess on my briefs.

Me or Travis?

It was difficult to tell. But one thing was clear—things had gotten messy.

Messy, complicated, and all kinds of…hot.

Even now, my dick was responding to remnants of what we'd left behind. What our subconscious had finally admitted to when left alone, with alcohol cheering us on.

I painted my lower abs with our confession and wondered how we would ever take this back. Could *we take it back? I wasn't sure. I wasn't even sure I wanted to.*

I refocused on the guy staring back at me and had no idea who he was.

Funny, when thirty minutes ago I thought I knew everything.

Why did it feel like everything had changed? Would I even be able to look at Travis without thinking about how good it felt to have his lips on mine? Would I ever not hear the breathy sounds he made when he wrapped his hand around our cocks? Had he ever thought of me that way before tonight?

Yes, *some faraway voice inside me confirmed.* You know he has. You've seen the way he looks at you. Flirts with you. Chooses to spend time with you over anyone else.

Had *I always known? Hell, maybe I liked it. Maybe I wanted his attention. When Travis focused on you, you felt like the only person in the*

room. Like you were special. He just had that effect on people.

On me.

But we couldn't do this. It was wrong. Imagine if our parents found out we had—

No, I couldn't think about that. We'd had a moment, a seriously hot one that would be burned into my brain forever, but it didn't mean anything beyond that. I wasn't into guys. And I definitely wasn't into my stepbrother. Was I?

I turned on the faucet and grabbed a hand towel to wash myself off. There was no hope for my boxer briefs, but I threw my shirt back on to cover the majority of the mess we'd made.

When I looked more put together than I felt, I opened the door to go find Travis. I had no idea what he was thinking, especially with my running off like that. It wasn't like I'd meant *to freak out, but going into shock meant I needed a minute.*

"Trav?" I called out as I headed back to the family room. He didn't answer, and he wasn't still laid out on the rug. I rounded the corner into the family room, thinking he might've put on a movie, but he wasn't there either. "Travis?"

I stood still, listening for his response, but the whole house felt too quiet. Had he gone up to his room and passed out already?

I checked the rest of the first floor before heading upstairs, thankfully feeling a lot more sober than I had when we first got home.

"Travis, wake up," I said, stopping in front of his closed door and rapping it a couple times. When he still didn't answer, I opened the door.

The room was empty, bed still made, everything in perfect order.

Frowning, I closed the door and then checked my room.

No Travis.

Had he left? Surely not. For one thing, he'd had more to drink than me, and for another, he wouldn't just leave me after what we'd done. Not without talking about it or joking about it or whatever Travis-like thing he'd do to break the ice.

I went back downstairs to grab my phone out of my pants and hit his number, keeping an ear out in case it went off somewhere in the penthouse.

It rang…and rang…and rang before going to voicemail, and I hung up and called again.

Where was he? I was ready to throw my pants back on and head out to make sure he was alive when, on the fourth try, he finally picked up.

"Travis? Jesus, where are you?"

"Gone. Isn't that what you wanted?" There was no mistaking the hurt lacing his tone, but why? I'd just needed a minute to breathe.

"No, I—"

The line went dead. Did he seriously just hang up on me? Or were we disconnected?

I tried calling him back, once, twice, and on the third attempt I cursed and decided a text would get my point across just as well.

Did you just hang up on me? I think we should talk. Text me.

I stared at the phone, willing him to text me, call me, do something. But it remained silent. The house so quiet and vast it felt like a tomb, which was appropriate, considering I wanted to die.

How had things gotten so messed up?

One minute we'd been having the time of our lives, best friends to brothers, imagining our futures and how much fun we'd have together in the years to come, and now he wouldn't even talk to me. Didn't want *to talk to me.*

Me. The one person he talked to about everything. Or so I'd thought.

That didn't bode well for our friendship or our future.

I walked back into the living room, my eyes shifting to the rug and the pants I'd lost in a moment of stupid foolishness, and realized that wasn't the only thing I'd lost.

I'd also lost the one person in the world I cared the most about, and I had no idea if I'd ever get him back.

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TWENTY

travis

THIS WAS STARTING to feel like déjà vu.

I'd seen Caleb in class on Friday, but then he'd disappeared all weekend. Did he seriously run off again? It sure felt that way. He'd finally responded to my texts and missed calls Saturday with *At a job*, and that was it. Not a word since then, and he hadn't come home.

Not that I'd been watching and waiting. I had a life too. I just figured my amazing show-and-tell would've enticed him to stick around.

I kept getting it all wrong with him. It was starting to piss me off.

I might've taken out my frustration on a few too many orange sesame tempura shrimp at the downtown foodie festival I'd gone to with Preston, JT, and West. They were greasy and delicious and forced me to walk around for a couple hours for them to go down instead of coming back up. That would've been tragic. Almost as tragic as checking my phone every five minutes to see if I'd heard from Caleb.

This was bullshit. I'd thought he would've grown up since last time, for fuck's sake. That he would know it wasn't a bad thing if it felt good.

Even if it was years ago, I'd never forget the way his expression had changed from such a blissed-out high to panic and dread the next. The way he'd scrambled to get away from me so fast and disappeared without a word. All the hope had drained out of my body when I realized he didn't feel the same. That he wasn't coming back out to say, *Never mind, that was amazing, no regrets.*

His reaction was nothing *but* regret, and the tears that stung my eyes had made it hard to put my clothes back on. I'd held it all in, the agony of

rejection, of being ashamed of who I was for the first time in my life, until I escaped out of the building. That was when I couldn't stop the stupid tears from falling. My chest physically hurt, like Caleb had ripped my heart out, shredded it to pieces, then stuffed it back inside and told me to get the fuck out.

I'd been such an idiot. I'd wanted to go back and erase the last half-hour before things turned to shit. I hadn't known how to fix it, and deep in my gut, I'd known it would be impossible. It felt like a death. It felt like a betrayal. A rejection of me and who I was from the person I'd trusted the most.

I'd walked for blocks before I even realized where I was heading, and East had let me stay, no questions asked. Well, there'd been questions—I just hadn't given any answers. I spent those hours building a wall back up, brick by brick, so that no one ever made me feel as shitty as I did that night.

Caleb had hurt me. And so I'd hurt him back, the only way I knew how.

Was it the most mature thing to do, looking back? No. But teenagers did stupid shit all the time, and I wasn't the most emotionally secure person then.

This time around, I wasn't letting us go down that path. We were gonna talk, whether he liked it or not.

It was dark by the time I got home Sunday night, but to my surprise, all the lights in the condo were on. I guess I'd expected Caleb to have moved out or found another place to stay, so hearing his shower shut off as I walked inside had relief flooding my veins.

It also had me gearing up for the argument threatening to burst out of me.

I made myself a drink and hopped up onto the island, legs swinging as I waited for the runaway to emerge, just dying to see what he had to say for himself, since I'd never called him out the first time. Like I should've.

Footsteps came down the hall, and Caleb walked out in nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist. He ran his hand through his wet hair, causing water to trickle down his neck and over his chest, and fuck, all the shit I wanted to throw at him disappeared in an instant as desire took over. All I wanted was to rip the towel off and lick every drop of water that fell down his impressive body.

Caleb looked up and stopped short. "Hey."

Hey? Was that all he had to say for himself? *Hey?*

"You and I need to have a little chat." I took a sip of my drink and set it aside, no longer needing any liquid courage. "What you're doing is bullshit."

Caleb's brows pulled together. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. This running-away bullshit didn't end so well the first time, so why'd you want to repeat it?"

"What are you talking about? I didn't run away."

"Not coming home all weekend sure feels like you did."

"I had a job." He tightened the towel at his waist, and I tried not to let myself get distracted by all that delicious skin on display.

"A job. Right. That happened to take you away for days after you watched me fuck myself."

A choked sound came out of Caleb. "Jesus, Travis."

"What? Was that too much for you?"

"No, I—" He shook his head and had to brush away the drops of water that fell from his hair onto his forehead. "I photographed a wedding weekend for one of Dad's friends in Amagansett. It was easier to stay than commute back and forth."

"I guess there's no cell service in the Hamptons, huh?"

He opened his mouth to respond, then licked his lips. "I was busy."

"Yeah, busy running."

"Hey, let's get one thing straight," he said, taking a couple steps toward me. "I wasn't the one who ran off the first time. That was you."

"I didn't run."

"Really?" Caleb shook his head. "You're so full of shit. You're telling me you didn't bolt the night of our parents' wedding?"

I opened my mouth to tell him I hadn't run anywhere that night, and he took another step closer.

"Because the way I remember it, I came out of the bathroom and couldn't find you anywhere."

"*Maybe* if you hadn't run in there in the first place, you would've known I *walked* out of the penthouse that night." *Cursing your name the whole way.*

"Well, excuse me for needing a moment to wrap my head around coming all over my *brother*."

My eyes widened at his outburst. "*Step*brother."

Caleb glowered at me, and I could practically see the blood boiling just beneath the surface. He never usually lost his shit first. But apparently he had a few things he wanted to get off his chest tonight too.

His very naked, wet chest.

“You never gave me a chance to explain,” Caleb said, and let out a breath. “Just like you’re doing right now, assuming, so maybe I should call bullshit on you. Because that is exactly why we are the way we are today.”

“So this is *my* fault?” I slipped down off the counter. “Is that what you’re saying?”

“All I’m saying is that you’re really good at jumping to conclusions.”

“And you’re really good at making someone feel like a piece of shit.”

Caleb reared back as though I’d sucker-punched him, and in a way I guess I kind of had. Sure, we’d danced our way around this argument a hundred and one times, but we’d never gotten into the thick of it. Never waded through the murky waters of the whos and whys. But apparently it was time to pay the fucking piper.

“Oh, so we’re gonna do this now?” I didn’t know why I bothered asking —I could see in his eyes he did. He was fuming mad, and so was I.

“You’re the one who brought it up.”

“Fine.”

“Fine. The night of the wedding, where did you go?”

“East’s.”

Caleb rolled his eyes. “Of course you fucking did.”

“You asked.”

“And did you tell him about us?”

“No.”

“Don’t lie to me.”

“I didn’t fucking tell him,” I snapped. “Why would I? So he could laugh at how you almost broke a leg trying to get away from me?”

“I didn’t—”

“What?” I scoffed. “Realize what you’d done and regret it instantly? Because that’s sure as fuck what your face said.”

“I was in shock. You had to know that.”

“How would I know that? I was seventeen. We were best friends. You came as hard as I did. How was I supposed to know you’d be horrified when the blood made its way back to your brain?”

“Oh my God.” Caleb shook his head, his eyes full of disbelief. “That’s what you thought, all this time?”

“No, it’s what I knew. I saw it all over your face, Caleb.”

“You saw confusion, shock, and a whole lot of panic. But not because I was horrified.” He brought a hand up to rub it over his face. “I was reeling that night, Travis, my mind in complete chaos, but instead of giving me *five fucking minutes* to work through it, you decided how I felt for me. Unbelievable.” He turned his back on me and walked across the living room

Wait. Did I get this all wrong?

“Can you even begin to imagine how I felt when you finally decided to come back?” he continued. “Days later, no calls, no messages, and all of a sudden you hated my guts, didn’t want anything to do with me. Iced me out completely like I’d done something wrong, and fuck, I thought I did.” He gripped the back of his neck and wheeled back around to face me. “I felt humiliated. I thought you and all your friends were laughing at getting the straight guy to give in. Like I was some prank. Kinda like—”

“JT,” I finished, oddly unsettled at the similarity. “You were never a prank, I swear. I would never do that to you.”

“Well, I thought you did. And all of that I could handle, but…why did you cut me off like that?”

“Because it was easier to ignore you than it was to look at you every day.” I sighed and pushed away from the island. “I’d wanted you for so fucking long. I could barely look at you without wondering what it’d be like to kiss you. Touch you. And then it happened and…” My voice cracked. “I’ll never forget the way you looked at me. Like I was the biggest mistake you ever made.”

“No. That’s not what I was thinking at all.”

“That’s what I saw. So yeah, I ignored you. I put a wall up. You rejected me, and the only way I knew how to deal with that was by rejecting you right back.”

Caleb stared at me for a long time before shaking his head slowly. “I wouldn’t have rejected you, Travis. I thought you knew me better than that.”

I thought I had too. But the agony I felt over his quick dismissal had been more than I was able to handle. All I could think was that I’d fucked up and ruined everything because I wanted to kiss him more than I wanted

to keep the status quo. Self-preservation kicked in. I couldn't let him hurt me any more than I already was.

Maybe if he hadn't disappeared so fast… Maybe if I hadn't freaked the fuck out too…

All the maybes in the world, but that didn't go back in time and fix anything.

A stab of regret through my chest had me rubbing my hand over it. "So what you're saying is we were a pair of idiot teenagers?"

He arched a brow. "Were? Because you seem ready to throw down with me right now."

My gaze dropped to the towel at his waist that had steadily gotten a little looser. "You have no idea how much I'd like to throw you down. On the couch. On your bed. On a rug…"

Caleb gnawed on his lower lip. "So, um, where does that leave us?"

I slowly walked across the living room. "Where do you want it to leave us?"

"I… I don't have an answer for that right now."

That was fair. A lot had just been said, and I didn't have too many answers myself.

"I still want you. Just so we're clear."

Caleb's lips crooked as I came to a stop in front of him. "I think you made that obvious the other night."

"Did I?"

"Yep. Right around the moment you said you wanted to fuck my mouth."

It wasn't often someone could shock me, but Caleb cut me to the core with that one.

"Sorry, was I too obvious? Because if I wasn't, you should also know"—I leaned forward to whisper in his ear—"I want you to fuck mine too."

Caleb leaned back to look me in the eye. "Right now?"

"Can you think of a better way for me to ask for your forgiveness?" Caleb's eyes fell to my mouth, and I added, "Please?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then, with a flick of his wrist, he dropped his towel.

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TWENTY-ONE

caleb

BEFORE I COULD talk myself out of it, I dropped my towel to the ground.

A rush of air tried to cool my feverish skin, but Travis's words had my insides scorching and my cock aching for what his mouth promised.

"Fuck." His blue eyes darkened and roamed my body like he was a starving man. "This is what you've been keeping from me all this time?"

God, this was crazy, standing here naked and putting myself on display for him. I knew better, knew this would cross a line we'd never be able to come back from, but damn if my body didn't respond to the way he wanted me so badly.

But it wasn't just him. Already my cock throbbed at just the thought of him touching me. Getting on his knees and sucking me. Wanting me. I hadn't been able to stop thinking about him all weekend, and now here we were, reigniting the flames.

He closed the space between us and trailed his fingers over my abs. "No running this time."

I didn't know whether he meant himself or me, but I didn't plan on going anywhere.

"You want to beg for my forgiveness?" I said. "Go ahead."

Travis's mouth kicked up on one side. "Did I say beg?"

"Sounded a lot like begging to me."

"You should know this about me." He slid his hand into my hair and angled his head to brush his lips against mine. "Whatever you want, I'll give it to you."

“And if I don’t know what I want?”

Travis grinned like a fiend. “Then it’ll be my pleasure to show you. But first…”

His fingers tightened in my hair as he pulled me forward, and the next thing I knew, his teasing tongue was in my mouth. I reached for him, needing some kind of physical proof that this was really happening, that I wasn’t imagining the way he was tasting every corner of my mouth, and the rough abrasion of his stubble under my palms was confirmation enough. So was the thick length I could feel behind the material of his pants as he moved in closer and rubbed it up against my naked cock.

A rumble of pleasure vibrated out of me, and Travis chuckled.

“Feel good?”

“Fuck yes.”

With a wicked grin, he slid his hands down my chest and around to my ass, then shoved a leg between mine and pulled me even closer.

“Kiss me again, and I’ll make it feel even better.”

He was daring me, checking to see I was as into this as he was. A kiss, one that I instigated, would mean I wanted this. Wanted him. It would prove I knew exactly what I was doing and with who.

I twisted my fingers in his longer strands and crushed my lips down on top of his. Travis’s fingers dug into the bare cheeks of my ass. A sexy growl of approval filled my ears as I speared my tongue inside his mouth and took from him the taste I’d always wanted.

I could admit that now, that my curiosity about Travis had never wavered.

How would he taste?

How would he feel?

But that night at the club had been such a whirlwind that I hadn’t had time to process it, the whiplash from hate to lust sending me reeling in a way that left me trying to make sense of it all. But that wasn’t the case now.

I could take my time here, not rush, not worry we would be interrupted, since there was a locked door between us and the world outside.

“Wait.” I lifted my lips from Travis’s just long enough to say, “The windows.”

“What about them?” He rubbed his leg up the inside of mine.

“Uh…” I lost my train of thought as his leg grazed my cock. “They’re open.”

“Guess that means we’ll have to put on a show.”

Before I could think about whether that was a good idea, he spun me around, backing me up against the windows. I sucked in a breath at the cold glass against my back and my bare ass, but Travis was right there, pressing up against me and licking inside my mouth.

The way he kissed had my head spinning, and I wrapped my arms around his waist to somehow get even more of him. How was it so good? The way our tongues tangled so perfectly in sync made it hard to believe I’d ever resisted him.

He took my aching length into his palm and closed his fingers around me. I cursed into his mouth.

“Your dick,” he said, giving it a slow stroke, “is fucking perfect. But it’ll be even more perfect inside my mouth.”

Warm breath below my neck had me breathing a little faster as Travis began to make his way down my body.

This is really happening.

His strong hands skated down my sides as he lowered himself to his knees and looked up at me under dark lashes.

“I want your eyes on me. I don’t want you thinking of anyone else.” He nuzzled his nose into the short, cropped curls above my dick and took in a deep breath.

Like I *could* think about anyone else with his mouth hovering over me, that face I’d once called *captivating* seducing me with the promise of pleasure I’d never experienced before.

I pushed my fingers through his hair and angled his head so he was looking directly at me. “Trust me, I don’t have one thought in my head right now that doesn’t revolve around you.”

“Good.” He angled my cock and flicked his tongue over the tip, making me shiver. “Now it’s time to make sure I’m the only one in your head *all* the time.”

Travis wrapped his lips around the plump head of my dick and lowered his mouth over me.

My toes curled into the hardwood floor as I gripped his hair tight, and when he drew me all the way to the back of his throat on the first swallow, I was perilously close to coming right then and there.

Jesus Christ. He was amazing at that. His mouth felt like heaven, and I was happy to take a minute or five exploring every exquisite moment of

being there.

Thankful I had something to support my seriously weak knees, I twisted my fingers in his hair and watched like a greedy voyeur as Travis drew his mouth up me, and followed that with his tight fist. He squeezed and stroked my pulsing shaft as he swiped his tongue across the swollen head, then dipped the tip into my slit. I slammed my eyes shut.

“Goddammit, Caleb.”

I opened my eyes to peer down at him resting back on his heels, rubbing his thumb over my sensitive skin, and the look of adoration mixed with lust had me thrusting my hips forward.

“I could become seriously addicted to this,” he said.

“You could? I’m the one getting sucked by a fucking master.”

“Ooh.” Travis stroked my cock along his curved lips, painting them with my pre-cum. “I like that. *Cockmaster*.”

A strangled chuckle escaped me. “I was thinking more Master Cocksucker.”

He gave me a rough pull, his eyes heavy with desire. “That’s even better. It means you have to do what I say.”

A thrill coursed through me at the thought, because who knew what outrageous thing would come from Travis’s dirty mind?

He didn’t disappoint as he lowered his head over me and said, “I want you to fuck my mouth, Caleb. Fuck it and come down my throat.”

I took hold of the base of my cock and fed it into his waiting mouth. He caressed my balls as he sucked me deep inside, looking up at me and waiting for the moment I’d lose control with him.

Had there ever been anything sexier than the picture Travis made on his knees? Even fully clothed, what I wouldn’t give to take a photo of this moment. I’d have to settle for a mental snapshot, but it wouldn’t be one I’d ever forget.

I moved my hands to either side of his head, spearing my fingers through his hair, and then thrust my hips forward. The head of my cock bumped up against the back of his throat, wrenching an incoherent curse from my chest.

Travis reached between my thighs, each hand gripping an ass cheek, forcing me to spread my legs farther apart so he could somehow get even closer, take even more of me.

It was all I could do to set the maddening pace we both craved—me, driving into his mouth, and him, greedily sucking every drop of pre-cum. When he swallowed around my sensitive tip, my head fell back against the window. But I didn't stop watching him. *Master Cocksucker* was an understatement, and I wasn't sure how long I could hold out as he took everything I had to give.

His fingers curled into my ass, and I had the fleeting thought that I hoped they left marks, something to remember this by if it never happened again. But I hoped this wasn't the last time I had Travis's mouth on me.

My grip tightened on him as my body began to jerk involuntarily, the struggle on keeping my orgasm at bay getting more challenging as he devoured my dick. I'd never been able to fully let go like this, to fuck without worrying if the other person could handle it.

Travis, it seemed, could handle anything and probably more.

"I can't…" Beads of sweat fell down my neck, my breathing coming faster as I got closer. "Travis—"

My words cut off as my climax hit so hard I blacked out. Thank fuck his hold on me never wavered, his sinfully skilled mouth riding me through the never-ending waves that racked my body.

"Holy shit," I breathed, the orgasm leaving me trembling against the window I'd forgotten about.

Travis continued to swallow every last drop, his moan of pleasure vibrating around my cock.

As my vision finally cleared, I saw a smug, satisfied smile curve his wicked lips.

"Tell me you're not going to want to do *that* again."

There was no way I could do that, not when I was already imagining it in vivid detail. I reached down and brushed my thumb over his swollen lips and said the only thing that made any sense right then: "No more running."

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TWENTY-TWO

travis

THE SECOND I stepped out of the Sprinter the next morning, my eyes caught on an all-too-familiar figure walking away from the taxi he'd grabbed yet again.

"Catch you later," I called over my shoulder to the guys before jogging to catch up with Caleb. He was wearing one of his favorite grey slouchy beanies, and I snatched it off his head, grinning when he whirled around to shoot whoever'd done it a dirty look. When he saw it was me, he shook his head.

"Really?" He grabbed it out of my hands and put it back on to cover the wild mess of hair he preferred not having to deal with for school.

"I can't believe you're still taking a cab. I figured now that we were on such good terms you'd give the Sprinter a try."

"That's exactly why I won't." Caleb side-eyed me. "You don't think that'd look even more suspicious?"

"Not if you keep up that hot, growly side that likes to fight with me."

One of the underclassmen who made a habit of volunteering to get coffee for our group ran out in front of us to open one of Astor's main doors, and I ruffled his hair as we passed. "Lookin' good, Max."

"Thanks, Travis." He blushed from the top of his unusually pale head to the tips of his fingers.

When we were out of earshot, Caleb lifted a brow. "You can't help yourself, can you?"

"Not in general, but what do you mean specifically?"

"That you'd flirt with a tree if you thought it waved at you."

“Maybe, but that wasn’t flirting. *You* should know.”

Caleb quickly glanced behind us, like he was making sure no one we knew was around. “Can we put a pause on this? People will start to notice you’re being nice. And by people, I mean your fellow pricks.”

“If we’re gonna talk about pricks, I’d really rather talk about yours. Who knew you had such a big, perfect—”

He slapped a hand over my mouth. “Travis.”

I licked his palm and laughed when he dropped his hand. “I thought you were calling me Master Cocksucker from now on?”

“Oh my God, you have to stop.”

I forced a frown. “That’s not what you said last night.”

“Hey guys,” a too-peppy-for-the-morning voice said behind us. Should’ve known it’d be JT, holding a coffee in each hand.

“Aw, you shouldn’t have.” I reached for one of the coffees, and he pulled his arm back.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t. Where’s West?”

“What, you don’t have a tracker on him yet?”

“My hands are too full to check it.”

A smile crooked my lips. He was starting to grow a little backbone, and I had to say, I liked it.

JT blew on one of the steaming coffees and narrowed his eyes on me. “By the way, did I just see Caleb get out of a taxi? That wouldn’t have anything to do with you, would it?”

I met Caleb’s eyes and smirked. “Actually, I’ve offered to give him many, *many* rides, but he’s always turned me down.”

JT made a gagging sound. “Gross. He’d never take you up on that. Now I don’t blame him for getting a taxi.” He looked past us, and his face lit up when West walked inside the building. “See you later. And Travis? Lay off Caleb.”

“I’d rather lie on him,” I said under my breath for Caleb’s benefit, and he dug his elbow into my ribs.

“Everyone is gonna think something’s up if you don’t go away.” He held up his hand when I started to respond. “And don’t make a sexual comment about that, either. I’ll see you in class.”

He turned on his heel to head in the direction of Livingston’s lecture hall, and I fell in step beside him.

“Look at that, we’re going to the same place.”

Caleb said nothing to that, knowing there was nothing he could do to get rid of me now. Livingston had made sure of that, because for the next hour or so, Caleb would have his gorgeous ass planted in the seat beside mine whether he liked it or not.

"You could look a little less happy about it," he said.

"Why?" I teetered forward on my toes, my lips near his ear. "There's no one in here we know."

"Yes, but everyone knows you."

"So?"

Caleb stopped halfway down the stairs to our aisle and turned on me, and like this I was a head taller than him. The perfect position to kiss.

"Have you forgotten the way gossip follows you and the rest of your crowd? We hate each other—"

"Hat*ed*. That's an important distinction to make. I'm not the type to fraternize with the enemy."

"Right, but no one else knows that." Caleb's eyes darted around the rapidly filling lecture hall. "We are still, supposedly, enemies. If you start being all…*you* with *me*, questions are going to be asked. Ones that will get back to—"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it." And he wasn't wrong. One nosy onlooker or eager eavesdropper and all of Astor would be speculating over just how close I was to my brother—

Sorry, *step*brother.

"Fine," I said, following Caleb into our row. "I won't talk to you the rest of the lecture."

Caleb tossed his bag to the floor and took his seat. "What are you going to do? Tape your mouth shut?"

I was about to tell him I could think of better ways to shut it, but I merely shrugged and took my seat.

Caleb snorted as I settled in beside him and pulled out my laptop and sketchbook. Then Livingston arrived and launched into what we'd be learning about today. About five minutes in and I zoned out, my eyes wandering instead to the tanned arm beside me, the jean-clad leg only inches from mine, and the fingers tapping on the end of the armrest.

Caleb seemed more restless than ever. But then again, he was usually concentrating on actively hating me, as opposed to today, when I liked to think he was thinking of actively fucking my—

“Would you stop?” Caleb’s voice pulled me from my little fantasy and back to the lecture hall. “I can’t concentrate with you doing that.”

I glanced down to see I was rubbing my leg up against the side of his. I hadn’t even realized I’d been doing it.

I picked up my pen and leaned across to his desk, flipping open his notebook. Then I wrote across the page:

Sorry. Was thinking about sucking your dick and it just happened.

I shoved it back toward Caleb and when he saw what I’d written, he quickly slammed it shut.

“Are you crazy?”

I opened up my sketchbook and wrote:

No. But I’m bored. Play with me?

I turned the page in his direction, and Caleb’s eyes widened.

Well, well, where did your mind just go? I thought.

One blowjob and your mind is in the gutter. What happened to being a good influence?

Caleb’s eyes narrowed, and he grabbed his pen and scrawled under my question:

Fuck you.

I let my eyes travel down over him, making sure to linger on his mouth, neck, chest, and the zipper of jeans, then put pen to paper again.

Is that a pick YES or NO kind of answer, because it's a definite YES. Please, fuck me.

Caleb cleared his throat, and Professor Livingston immediately zeroed in on the two of us.

"Do you have something to add, Mr. Reeves?"

I waggled my brows at him, and Caleb looked like he wanted to kiss or throttle me. I had a feeling he was leaning more toward the latter, though, the killjoy.

"No," he said, turning to face Livingston. "I just had a bit of an… irritation. Sorry."

I bit down on my lip, trying not to laugh, as Livingston arched a bushy brow at Caleb, clearly not buying what he was selling. When he went back to what he'd been talking about Caleb, gave me a *quit it* look.

Hey, he was the one that didn't want me to talk. Not communicating at *all* would be asking the impossible.

I went back to writing him a note.

Aren't you curious what my piercing feels like?

When I pushed the pad his way, he did a double take. Then he quickly scribbled something back, and I smiled in satisfaction.

Shit. I am now.

As I wrote, *Care to blow this*, he rolled his eyes, then I added, *joint?*

I tapped my pen on the pad, hoping his answer would be yes, but fully expecting the one I got instead.

No. I'm your good influence, remember?

Care to influence me in the staff bathroom!

Just how many guys have you taken back there?

Today?

When he stared at me, I smirked.

None, but I hear it's private. Good acoustics.

Noted.

For later?

He shifted in his seat, his shoulder bumping up against mine, and it was almost pathetic how much I craved every little touch. How I'd do anything for his attention. But that was the power he'd always held over me, the reason I'd shut myself down the first time around.

Caleb Reeves was my biggest weakness, one I couldn't seem to resist, and when he turned his head, a crooked smile tugged at his lips and I felt myself fall even deeper under his spell.

And just when I thought he'd turn me down, he reached over and scrawled across the paper:

Yeah, come find me later.

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TWENTY-THREE

caleb

JT

GONNA GRAB lunch with West. Wanna join?

I dropped my bag on the table in the back corner of the library that it looked like I'd be having all to myself today.

Nope. Have fun

Third-wheeling it with the lovebirds wasn't my favorite thing, though I appreciated that JT always made sure I didn't feel left out. I had enough work to catch up on, though, so I took a seat at our usual spot and opened up my laptop.

I didn't know how much time had passed when I felt someone move in behind me, and then a warm pair of lips kissed the back of my neck. Surprise had me stiffening, but I didn't have to turn around to know who it was. Only one person would be that bold.

Travis took the seat beside me, mischief twinkling in his light blue gaze. "Found you."

"I'm impressed. I wouldn't have thought you'd know where the library even is."

Travis looked around, feigning surprise. "That's what this place is? I figured it was a breeding ground for academic types allergic to socializing."

"Well, that too."

“You don’t come here to…*read*, do you?”

I cracked a smile. “It wouldn’t be a totally foreign concept.”

“Hmm. Sexy *and* smart. That’s hot.” He scooted his chair in closer to me and laid one arm along the back of mine. His knees rubbed up along my thigh, and when he dropped his chin on my shoulder, I shifted away. The move felt so familiar, even though it’d been years since we’d been this close. He used to come in my room when I was studying or editing videos and plop down on the bed to distract me.

It usually worked, too.

I tried to focus on the paper on my screen. “Go away, trouble.”

“I’d get into more trouble without you, remember? You’re my good influence.”

“Does that mean you’re here to study?”

“Yes.” His hand found its way onto my thigh and began inching its way up. “I’m here to study your reactions when I touch you.”

I reached down to stop his wandering fingers. “What are you really doing here?”

“You told me to come find you.” He smiled unrepentantly. “Here I am.”

Everything about him made my stomach flip. His words. The way he’d tracked me down. The fact that he didn’t give a shit about touching me in public.

I pushed his hand away, not wanting to attract attention. My body was already responding to his being so close, remembering the way it’d felt to have his lips wrapped around my cock. One sexual encounter and suddenly he was all I could think about. Or maybe it was just that I’d stopped pushing him to the back of my mind like he didn’t exist.

“You know,” he said, undeterred as he dropped the hand he had on the back of my chair to finger the waist of my jeans, “if you want to research anything, my body is available for your eyes only.”

I glanced around the room again, making sure my fellow academic types were keeping their focus on their own business. “Oh yeah? Just my eyes? I can’t explore with anything else?”

He licked his lips while looking at my mouth. “What did you have in mind?”

I chuckled and shook my head. “You haven’t changed one bit, you know that?”

Travis cocked his head to the side. “Changed? Since when? It’s not like it’s been years since you’ve seen me.”

“No, but…” When I trailed off, a curious expression lit his eyes. “It’s been a while since we were like this.” I gestured between the two of us and the easy way we were sitting with one another, but Travis, being Travis, couldn’t let the innocent observation stay that way.

“I don’t think we were ever like *this*.” His fingers found the waistband of my jeans again, but this time stroked over the skin just above it. “Trust me, I would’ve remembered. I fantasized about it every fucking day.”

“Why didn’t you ever tell me?”

“That I had a hard-on for you?”

“Jesus.” I did another quick look around to make sure no one was within earshot. “Yeah. Back then we told each other everything. At least, I thought we did, but you never once hinted at how you felt.”

Travis chewed on the inside of his cheek, an almost-sheepish expression on his face. “Didn’t I? I thought I was pretty obvious—always showing off my new clothes for you and making myself the center of attention whenever you were in a room. I wanted your eyes on me.” He shrugged and rested an elbow on the table. “I still do.”

I tossed my pen down and leaned back in my seat, running my eyes over him. From his jet-back hair to his angular face and full lips, Travis was undeniably sexy. But add in the smoky kohl he’d added to his piercing blue eyes and it was difficult to tear your gaze away from him.

And that’d been half the problem—*everyone* looked at Travis. Guys, girls, parents, teachers; he walked in a room and he was the center of attention. So I’d never imagined he was busy vying for *my* attention.

The fact that he had been did serious things to my insides. Crazy, stupid things I was still coming to grips with.

When I still hadn’t said anything, Travis straightened in his seat. “Say something, would you? You’re making me nervous.”

“Seriously?”

“Well, no, but I just confessed my teenage sex fantasies about you and you’re all, like, silent.”

Funny, but if I didn’t know better, I might think I really *was* making him nervous. But no, this was Travis. If there was one thing he was confident about, it was his sexuality. It’d been that way since he’d lost his virginity, age fourteen.

I gave my most casual shrug then decided to play with him a bit. After all, that was what he'd asked me to do with him in class, right?

"I was just wondering what some of those fantasies were. That's all."

Travis's eyes widened and his mouth fell open. "That's *all*?" He scooted in close again. "Where do you want me to start?"

I chuckled. "You know, if you got this excited about studying, you could really do something with your life."

He rolled his eyes. "If I got this excited about studying it would be a sure sign I had *no* life. And don't even try changing the subject."

"Which was?" I teased, my lips twitching.

"My sex fantasies." He reached out and drew a finger up the side of my neck, twirling it in the end of my hair. "I had a pretty good one about this place when I found out you were in here."

"The library?"

"I wondered what it would be like to make out with a scholastic type." He got to his feet and moved between me and the table, looking down at me with a smirk. "Know anyone here who might want to volunteer?"

My heart hammered as I stared up at him, and I wondered how I'd been so blind to what was in front of me back then. How oblivious I'd been not only to his feelings but my own.

Or maybe I hadn't been. Travis had confessed to wanting my attention and eyes on him, but hadn't it been the same for me? We'd been inseparable, and that went both ways. But I'd just chalked it up to friendship and brotherly bonds. What if it had been that, but more?

Because there was nothing brotherly about the way I was feeling right now, with him standing between my legs, looking down at me like he wanted to crawl in my lap.

"Caleb?"

"Hmm?"

"You want to make out with me in the library stacks?"

My dick lurched at the question, the idea of his mouth back on mine making it seriously happy.

Then, as if he'd read my mind, Travis moved in between my legs and leaned down to say by my ear, "Or I can climb on your lap and look over your shoulder to tell you if someone's coming."

He flicked his tongue over my ear, and I sucked in a breath.

"Including you."

Oh my *God*, he was trying to kill me—and give anyone who happened to look up from their computer a show, which wasn't a smart idea.

"Follow me," I whispered, pushing my chair back to get to my feet. The back of my hand brushed his as I sidestepped him and walked quietly in the direction of the subjects I never noticed anyone browsing. The shelving units reached up toward the ceiling, all covered in a fine dust from neglect. Even though the threat of being caught was low, a thrill ran through me at doing something we shouldn't.

Who *was* I?

Travis moved in beside me, tucking his hand into my back pocket and giving my ass a squeeze. I glanced behind us, making sure no one followed, and when the coast was clear, I grabbed the front of his shirt and tugged him into one of the narrow aisles.

His tongue eagerly met mine when I crashed my mouth down onto his, diving inside like he hadn't gotten enough of me last night. He moaned, and I jerked back, covering his lips with my hand.

"We have to be quiet. Think you can do that?"

"No," he said, a grin full of devilry curling his lips. He gripped the back of my neck, shutting me up with a kiss so intense it was like an electric shock.

We were *so* getting caught. But that didn't stop me from taking what I wanted.

As I snaked a hand down between his thighs, he sucked on my tongue and thrust his hips forward, encouraging me to do it. Take him in my hand. Do whatever the hell I wanted to him. He was practically begging for it, and the high it gave me to know his cock was already so hard and ready for me was unreal.

"Fuck yes," he said, his voice low.

I was so curious. What would he feel like? Hell, what that *piercing* would feel like? I'd never gotten another guy off before, and the urgency to find out all of those things before we got busted had me unbuttoning his pants and shoving my hand down inside his briefs.

The moment I wrapped my fingers around his dick, Travis cursed and sucked in a breath. He dove back into my mouth, devouring me so thoroughly there wasn't anywhere I didn't feel him. His hands slid into my hair, and my slouchy beanie fell to the ground when I began to explore the velvet softness of his steely length.

It was so different, touching Travis, but it also somehow felt natural—my fingers knew exactly where and how to move to have his hips arching and swallowing down the little noises he couldn't stop making.

I loved this, relished it. But wished we weren't between the library stacks so I could fully explore him the way I suddenly needed to.

"God, yes, keep doing that—"

I cut off his words with a kiss and swirled my thumb along the head of his dick. I didn't know why I thought his piercing would be cool to the touch, but it was warm and slick with pre-cum, and I had the urge to flick it with my tongue.

Shit, where had that come from? I couldn't exactly get down on my knees right here—not that Travis would object if I did.

I tore my lips from his, my breathing heavy as I stroked him. "One of these days… I want to lick this."

"Yesss— Oh shit." That was the only warning I got before his cock jerked in my palm, and a heartbeat later, a hot jet of cum coated my fingers.

Holy fuck, had I just made him come by giving him one of *my* fantasies?

He rode my hand through it, his moans muffled by my shoulder where he'd buried his face, and goddamn, I felt pretty fuckin' proud of myself. I'd made Travis come with barely a touch, and the high I felt from that was potent as hell.

"Just so you know," Travis said, kissing his way up to my ear, "*that* was all your fault. I was going to be polite and warn you, but then you had to go and run that sexy fucking mouth of yours."

He flicked his tongue over my lobe, and I turned to take his lips with mine, needing another taste before I let him go.

"You mean that's not normal for you?"

"To come like some horny virgin?" He thought about that for a moment then nipped at my lower lip. "Maybe with you."

I grinned, liking that answer a little too much. But just as I opened my mouth to respond, I heard the sound of footsteps heading in our direction.

Shit.

Travis's wide eyes met mine, and I quickly wiped my hand on the outside of his briefs and moved in front of him so he could zip up.

I grabbed a book off the shelf and flipped it open just as a security guard came around the corner.

“Here it is,” I said, pointing to the open page. “I told you I’d find it.”

“Thanks. I was having a *hard* time locating it.” I could hear the smirk in Travis’s voice.

My heart was beating a mile a minute as I looked up at the guard with what I hoped wasn’t the expression of someone who’d just gotten someone off a few seconds ago.

The guard looked between the two of us, suspicion clear on his face. He kicked his chin toward a spot behind us. “You dropped something.”

Travis snatched my beanie off the ground and gave the guard a charming smile no one could resist. “Appreciate it, officer.”

He watched us for another beat then grunted and moved on.

Apparently I’d been holding my breath the whole time, because it came out in a whoosh, and I turned toward Travis, whose shoulders were shaking as he struggled to hold back a laugh.

He placed the beanie back on my head, tugging it down just where I liked it. “So. Who’s the bad influence now?”

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TWENTY-FOUR

travis

WHAT ARE YOU wearing?

RISKY BUSINESS:

You'll see

But don't make it obvious

Right, because as Caleb had reminded me for the hundredth time, we needed to keep up pretenses in front of the guys, especially tonight. Maybe he thought I got a little loose-lipped when I drank and didn't want me standing on top of another bar calling him out.

Hey, I could keep my mouth shut. Sometimes. Although apparently I *did* need to remember to throw a few insults and glares his way every now and then. That could be fun. A different kind of foreplay.

The line of people waiting to get inside Gilt wrapped around the entire block, but Scotty drove us past them all, coming to a stop in front of the entrance.

"So Caleb doesn't mind being seen walking in with us, but he still won't catch a ride?" West rolled his eyes. "Does he have some kind of restraining order against you we don't know about?"

I tried to be casual as I scanned the sidewalk, looking for a glimpse of him. "How do you know I'm not the one with the court order?"

"Because you like to torture him by getting all up in his space, and he's the one constantly running away from you."

Ouch. The truth hurt—but he wasn't running anymore. I had to bite back my smile at the thought, because being near Caleb again was just like old times. Better, actually, because this time I didn't have to keep my hands to myself. It felt too good to be true, that he'd even want me to touch him. A part of me kept waiting for him to decide he wasn't into this and shut me back down again. But there was another, smaller part of me that was… hopeful. Hopeful he was realizing after all this time that he couldn't live without me.

God, I was nothing if not dramatic.

Caleb turned around as Scotty opened the Sprinter door, and I lingered by the window to look at him as the other guys filed out. Damn. He'd styled his hair back from his face and left the top buttons of his scarlet dress shirt undone, and he'd switched out his favored jeans for a pair of black pants. As much as I'd recently learned I preferred him completely naked, I couldn't tear my eyes away from how good he looked standing there all dressed up. It didn't seem to matter what he was wearing, though. Jeans. Sweats. A tux. He was always the most gorgeous thing I'd ever seen.

My stomach flipped as he ran his gaze over the Sprinter windows and stopped briefly on me. He looked away, a hint of a smile on that sexy mouth, and then pulled out his phone.

RISKY BUSINESS:

You're staring

Impossible not to

RISKY BUSINESS:

Might help to look a little more pissed off

Caleb looked up as Gavin headed in his direction and shoved his phone back in his pocket.

"Trav, he's not gonna bite," Donovan said from where he stood on the steps waiting for me. Everyone else had already piled out, and there I was, being as obvious as Caleb said not to be.

I stood up, smoothing down my shirt and easily channeled my inner asshole. "You don't know that. Those canines look sharp."

"Dude, try to be nice." Donovan gave me a pleading look.

“I’m always nice.”

“You know what I mean. Can we have one night where the two of you aren’t going at it?”

Well, when he put it that way, it was damn near impossible. Just not the way he was thinking.

I gave him a light smack on the cheek as I passed. “Don’t worry so much.”

We headed toward to the roped-off entrance to see East already chatting with the guy manning the doors, and the second his name was mentioned, the rope was pulled back and we were ushered inside.

I made sure to hang back with Donovan and Kelly as JT chatted with his best buddy Caleb, and did my best to play things cool. Not the easiest thing when what I wanted was to be the one laughing with Caleb.

The pounding rhythm of a remixed favorite pulsated throughout the club as we weaved our way through the crowds mingling around the bar. There was no way we were going to fight to get to the front of that crowd, instead following East’s lead to where our VIP area would be waiting for us with a designated waiter.

I scanned the barely dressed bodies already writhing on the dance floor and wondered how much crazier things would get by the end of the night, considering the doors had only opened an hour or so ago.

“This place is packed!” Gavin called back at us, as Daire scowled at anyone who came within arm-brushing distance of his man. “Plenty of singles out there for you to mingle with tonight, hey, Trav?”

That was exactly what I’d be thinking on any other night. But the only single *I* wanted to mingle with was currently being sized up by a group of women he passed by. A couple of them grinned and made eyes at him in a way that made me want to go over and scratch their eyes out—especially the blonde’s.

“In that outfit?” Kelly gave me an approving nod. “I doubt he’ll be dancing alone for long.”

“He’s not wrong.” Donovan ran his critical eye over my outfit. “Yours, or someone I need to know about?”

“One-of-a-kind original, baby.”

As I headed up the couple of steps to the VIP area, Donovan grabbed my arm.

“When you’re ready to share your talent with the rest of the world, let me know, okay? Because everyone needs to see these.”

“Thanks. I will. But I don’t think the world’s quite ready for me yet.”

“Well, when you think they are…” Donovan grinned and took Kelly’s hand, passing me by. This wasn’t the first time he’d had offered to wear or model one of my designs, and it was flattering to think that a model of his caliber wanted to be seen in something I made. But I wasn’t quite sure I was ready for that kind of attention on my work. Or to have something I loved be picked apart and put under a microscope.

I wonder if that’s how Caleb feels about me—us?

Not that I thought he loved me or anything—we’d only just started to be able to exist in the same room without committing murder. But maybe it was a similar kind of sentiment. He didn’t want others weighing in on whatever it was we were doing with each other just yet.

“You gonna come sit and have a drink with us?” West called out, settling into a black velvet couch and pulling JT onto his lap. “Or you gonna guard the entrance all night to keep the riffraff out?”

Caleb’s eyes on me were almost as tangible as one of his hands, and with the way that made my body react, I made sure to keep my attention focused on West—who of course had to be sitting right fucking next to him.

“Well, you’re in here, so I guess I’m doing a lousy job at playing guard.” I took a seat by East, who was on the opposite side of our private area, and took an offered shot. “Is this tequila?”

East smiled. “The best money can buy. I thought it would be a good way to help Caleb remember how much he likes us.”

My eyes flicked to the man I’d been avoiding looking at since we’d entered the club. Caleb was leveling East with a glacial stare.

“I’m not drinking tequila.”

“I agree.” East gestured to the tray being passed around. “You’re going to do a *shot* of tequila, and you’re going to enjoy it.”

Caleb shook his head as the tray got closer. “I don’t drink that anymore.”

“Why?” I said, seizing the opportunity to dive in and add a bratty comment or three to the mix. *Thanks East.* “Because it actually makes you a fun human?”

Caleb’s eyes shifted to mine, the glacier only melting slightly as it drifted in my direction.

“No.” He looked at all our ridiculous grins and added, “Because it reminds me of a bunch of pricks I used to know.”

“Well, you don’t have to worry about that now.” JT chuckled.

“Yes he does.” East’s voice dripped with devilry. “Because when he drinks tequila, he’s just as much a *prick* as the rest of us. Hmm, maybe you’re worried your Golden Boy will think differently of you.”

“*Whose* Golden Boy?” West interjected, glaring at East, who waved off the interruption.

“Or maybe”—I threw back my own shot of tequila and arched a brow in Caleb’s direction—“you’re worried it’ll make you take your clothes off in public again.”

JT’s mouth fell open as he whipped his head back to Caleb, who looked like he wanted to strangle me. Hey, he was the one who said to play it cool and keep the guys off the scent. I was just following orders—and picturing him naked.

“You took your clothes off? When?” JT asked.

“Does it matter?” East said in a bored tone. “The point is, Caleb is more fun with tequila running through his veins, and tonight we are going to remind him how to have fun.”

The tray stopped in front of Caleb, one shot glass left, and as everyone leaned in to see if he would take the challenge that had just been thrown down, he looked to me and I mouthed, *Dare you.*

The only indication that he noticed was a slight narrowing of his eyes, then he reached for the shot glass and tossed it back.

Oh yeah, baby. Game on.

The empty tray was immediately replaced with a full one, and as it made its way around and I tossed back my second shot, East leaned in and gestured toward the dance floor. “You going on the hunt tonight?”

My answer should’ve been a definite yes, but after having Caleb’s cock in my mouth and coming in his hand this week, it was more difficult to get it out than I would’ve expected. Something East immediately picked up on.

“Interesting. Do I detect a hint of hesitation there?”

Shit. This was exactly what Caleb had been worried about, but I’d be damned if I fucked this up tonight. He didn’t think I could keep this thing between us—whatever it was—a secret? Well, I’d show him.

“Please.” I shifted on the seat to look past East’s shoulder to the dance floor. “I’m just checking out what’s on offer.”

“And? Is anyone piquing your interest?”

Yeah, he’s sitting across from us drinking shots that used to make him take his clothes off.

“There’s a couple.”

“Ooh, looking for a little threesome action, are we?”

I’d definitely thought about it in the past, but in this case, East was way off. Not that I was about to tell him that.

“Maybe. Two bodies are always better than one when it comes to reminding myself I’m single and carefree.”

East shrugged, completely unimpressed. “Seems like a whole lot of extra work, if you ask me.”

“Yeah, I can see that. I’m sure it’s an effort for you to think of making anyone come other than yourself. Let alone *two* others.”

East arched a brow. “Being a little mouthy over there, McKinney. I don’t see you rushing to get between anyone.”

“Because you keep ordering drinks.”

“This is true. Okay, let’s see what we’ve got to play with.” East got to his feet, and I followed, my eyes cutting across the VIP area to where Caleb’s were tracking my every step.

Who’s having a hard time playing it cool now?

Caleb licked his lower lip, and I couldn’t help but wonder if I sucked it into my mouth if I’d taste the tequila he swallowed earlier. Was he feeling the effects already? He was two shots in, like me, and if his teasing tongue was any indication, he was definitely feeling a little looser.

If only I could get him alone somewhere…

“How about that guy?” East said as he stopped at the edge of our roped-off area, and I turned my attention to the dance floor. “Dark hair, leather pants, eyes all but begging you to come fuck him.”

East wasn’t wrong. The guy under discussion was facing our VIP section swaying his hips to the beat of the music. He was a great dancer, sliding his hands over his toned body in a way that would usually have my dick wondering how they’d feel wrapped around it. But when East raised a hand and crooked a finger at him and he started our way, all I could think about was Caleb sitting behind me.

Fuck. What was I supposed to do now?

East was calling this guy over for me. If I didn’t take advantage of the situation, alarm bells would go off, but if I *did* dance, Caleb would have my

balls.

Or would he? He was the one who'd told me not to be obvious about how I felt toward him, and this was the best way to do that. Flirt with a stranger. That was normal behavior. Dance with him. Even more normal.

Just don't go home with him.

I could do that. I'd just feign a headache. Wasn't that what people did when they didn't want to have sex? Fucked if I knew.

"Hey," Leather Pants said with a grin just this side of sexy, one that said he knew he was hot, and if it'd been any other night, I would've found somewhere dark and private with him. But it wasn't, and my spine started to tingle like *someone* was trying to incinerate me from behind.

"Hey, yourself. You look like you're having fun out there."

"Do I?" He took a step closer to us. "Bet I'd have more fun if you joined me."

An automatic *I don't think so* was so close to rolling off my tongue. But knowing I needed to keep up the charade, I walked over to the steps to join Leather Pants.

My stomach turned, a sharp stab of guilt piercing me as I looked back to where Caleb was sitting. But he wasn't paying attention to me. He was locked in on my new dancer partner, his stare shooting lasers. Then his attention shifted to East.

Caleb's lips twisted into a tight line. "Hey, East? You got any more of that tequila?"

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TWENTY-FIVE

caleb

“THE FACT THAT you’re not dancing on the table half-naked means you haven’t imbibed enough of these yet.” East swung a shot of tequila in front of my face, and I waved him off.

“I’m not here for your entertainment.”

He cocked a brow and threw the shot back himself. “Aren’t you?”

Thank God for a higher tolerance these days—with drinking *and* patience, because East was trying his best to wear me down with both.

The only reason I hadn’t told him to go the hell away was because he served as a distraction for the fuckery that’d been happening on the other side of the VIP. And on the dance floor. And at the bar.

I chanced a look in Travis’s direction, shocked he’d finally detached himself from the guy who’d been stealing his attention all night. He was like a magnet for fuck’s sake, never left alone for more than a minute before someone else swooped in. At least right now it was only Donovan and Kelly, not some asshole trying to get in his pants.

I gestured for another shot from East, who was only too happy to oblige. I still wasn’t getting trashed and dancing on the table, though. More like getting trashed and sitting my ass on this couch.

“It’s not usually you glaring him to death,” Gavin said as he plopped down beside me, his platinum hair stuck to his forehead from dancing with Daire. Well, *he’d* been dancing, while Daire seemed satisfied to be the pole. “Everything okay?”

“Fucking perfect.”

“Uh oh.”

I sank down further into the cushions, stretching my spread legs as our server handed me a beer. “What?”

“What’s he done now?”

Following Gavin’s stare, my eyes connected with Travis’s for a heartbeat before he looked away. Seemed like giving him a reminder to play it cool was unnecessary after all. He was doing a damn good job acting like nothing was different, flirting with every guy East and even Kelly had introduced him to.

Why was I so damn bothered? So we’d fooled around a couple times and he’d confessed he’d always harbored a crush on me. It didn’t mean I should expect him not to look at someone else. I didn’t have that kind of hold on him. We were just…

What *were* we? I didn’t even know. All I knew was the uneasy feeling in my stomach tonight wasn’t just from the tequila.

So what exactly had Travis done to cause my foul mood, which, according to Gavin’s line of questioning, was apparent?

“Nothing out of the ordinary,” I said.

“Well, if you ever need someone to talk to, I’m only a couple floors away. I can’t promise I’ll help you exact revenge, since I kinda like the guy, but I’m a good listener.”

Of course he liked Travis. Everyone did. Even I did. That was what was so damn annoying.

“Thanks, man, I just need to—”

“Drink some more!” West slid into the seat beside me, bumping shoulders with me, two shot glasses in his hand. “Look, the best way to forget someone is to get blind drunk. And since you can clearly see that dumb motherfucker you’re related to—”

“We’re not related.”

“Eh, details, but since you can still see him and he’s clearly annoying you just by *existing*, you need more liquor.”

JT frowned at his boyfriend. “West, come on. Don’t force—”

I’d downed the first glass and was reaching for the second before he could even finish his thought.

“Okay, well, maybe we should get a bottle—”

“That’s a *great* idea,” I said, getting to my feet, and that was when the alcohol made its presence known. The room started to spin. “What have we been drinking?”

“I meant a bottle of *water*,” JT said as he reached for my arm, but I tugged it away.

I knew he meant well, and was probably wondering who had hijacked his best friend. But the tequila had a hold of me now, and the last thing I wanted was to sober up and have to sit there and watch Travis get his dick stroked by whoever was next in line.

“Don Julio’s the man on your tongue tonight.” East smirked. “He making you want to strip yet?”

“I was getting a little hot, but—”

“He’s *not* taking his clothes off.” JT stepped between me and East, bless his heart. Like anyone could deter James Easton when he wanted to fuck with someone.

“Not for you, anyway.” East turned and looked back out to the dance floor, where some guy was swaying his way down Travis’s front. “But maybe someone else?”

East had a knowing smirk on his lips. At least, that was the way it looked to me, but I was super fucking drunk and paranoid they were going to find out about me and Travis.

Travis and me…

No matter which way I phrased it, it still felt strange.

Travis and I are friends…

Travis and I are stepbrothers…

Travis and I like to kiss each other…

Travis and I like to come together…

“Do you think he’s passed out standing up?” Donovan clicked his fingers in front of my face a couple of times, and my brain snapped back to reality. “Whoa, there he is. Dude, you good? You look a little spacey.”

I *felt* spacey, like my brain had left my body and now my dick was in total control, because all I could think about was that Travis was out on that dance floor with someone that wasn’t me.

I didn’t like it.

“Maybe a bottle of water wouldn’t be such a bad idea,” Kelly said from behind his boyfriend.

“I don’t want water,” I said. “I didn’t even want tequila, but noooo, you all forced that on me too.”

“He did that.” Gavin pointed at East, who shrugged.

“I don’t deny it. But he’d be far more miserable without Don Julio.”

“I’m not miserable.”

“No? My mistake. I could’ve sworn your bender started around the time Travis hit the dance floor.”

That wasn’t true. Was it? No. I’d had a couple of shots before then.

“Why would he care that Travis is dancing?” JT said as I tried to keep up, but then my eyes caught on Travis’s dance partner, and like someone in a trance I walked over to the edge of the VIP lounge as the slippery little snake wound himself up Travis’s lean body.

East and the rest of the guys kept up their chatter behind me, but my attention was now fully on Travis.

“Jesus, West, how is your boyfriend still so clueless?”

“I’m not clueless. I just don’t understand what the hell you—”

“They’re fucking, genius.”

That somehow made its way into my inebriated brain enough to have me turn to East. “We’re *not* fucking.”

“Of course you’re not.” JT rolled his eyes at East. “They’re brothers, in case you forgot.”

“Stepbrothers,” Donovan said under his breath, but loud enough that JT caught it.

“You guys need to leave him alone and stop making shit up.”

I could hear the way JT was defending me, but everything was white noise as Travis’s dance partner pulled out his phone for a sexy selfie, the pose so suggestive I didn’t know why he didn’t just stamp MINE on Travis’s forehead.

“Who’s making shit up?” someone responded, but I didn’t know who it was, because somehow I’d stumbled out of the VIP and was pushing my way through the sweaty bodies blocking my path. My vision turned red around the edges, and somewhere in the back of my mind I knew I should’ve kept my ass on that couch, but I couldn’t sit there and watch this guy think he was going home with Travis. I didn’t give a shit how irrational that sounded or that I had no claim whatsoever. This was bullshit.

Travis’s back was to me, hips gyrating in a way they shouldn’t be with anyone else. The asshole dance partner had one arm wrapped around Travis’s neck, and before I could think twice, I grabbed him and shoved him off.

Travis whirled around. “Caleb? What are you—”

The asshole dance partner didn’t take too kindly to my knocking him away, because he pushed me in the chest, making me lose my balance and hit the wall.

Wait, that wasn’t a wall. That was Daire’s chest.

“There a problem?” he said, looking straight at the asshole.

“Yeah, this guy’s trying to start shit.”

“Maybe you should keep your hands to yourself.” I lunged to shove him right back, but Daire grabbed the back of my shirt, keeping me away.

Travis stepped in front of me, and immediately I forgot about anyone else as those blue eyes held mine. “Caleb, what are you doing?”

“You promised your body was available for my eyes *only*.”

Travis’s nose flared, and he glanced up at Daire, who let go of my shirt and backed away.

“While this is super fucking hot, we can’t do this here,” Travis said. “Okay?”

I heard the words coming out of his mouth, but my head wasn’t comprehending anything but how shit it was to see someone else’s hands where mine had been.

“Can someone get security to get this guy out?” The asshole was still protesting behind Travis, but one look from Daire and he snapped his mouth shut.

“Don’t be too upset,” East told him as he came from out of nowhere. “You know how brothers are. And these two are *very* close.”

Travis held his hand up for East to stay back. “Can you not right now?”

“Just providing commentary for those who are a little confused. We’re all enjoying the show, though, so carry on.”

It was then that I realized the entire group had made their way out onto the dance floor and had us surrounded. Travis took one look at our audience and turned back to me.

“I think you’ve had too much to drink.”

“Told you he was more fun on tequila,” East interjected, and I flipped him off. At least, I thought I flipped him off—no telling if it was the right finger. I was starting to sway and see double.

“Okay, I think it’s time to call it a night and get you home.” Travis lifted my arm, placed it around his neck, and then held me tight by the waist to keep me upright.

I was vaguely aware of the stares from the group, especially the baffled look on JT's face, but all I could seem to focus on was where Travis was touching me. It didn't escape my notice that this was what I'd wanted all night, and I'd made it happen. My drunk ass would've high-fived myself if I didn't think I'd fall over.

As we made it out of the club to where the Sprinter waited at the curb, Travis's breath was hot on my neck. "And you thought *I* was the one who would spill all our secrets," he said.

Scotty opened the door for us, and I didn't have it in me to protest riding in the van with everyone.

"All right, let's get you home and in bed." Travis helped me step up inside, where I collapsed into the first seat I saw.

"Wait, whose bed?" East asked.

I barely heard Travis's response as my head hit the back of the seat and my eyes started to close.

The last thing I remembered before passing out was East's answering chuckle. "Aww, isn't brotherly love grand?"

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TWENTY-SIX

travis

“YOU GOT HIM?” Donovan and Kelly watched warily as Caleb and I bumped into the wall while making our way down the hallway to our condo.

One more shot and we’d all be carrying his ass.

“All good,” I said, reaching for the key card in my pocket. “No need for you to risk getting puked on.”

“I’m not gonna be sick,” Caleb protested, and tried to wriggle out of my hold. “I can walk.”

“I’d say I’d love to see you try, but I don’t care to drag you down the hall when you bust it.”

“Not gonna fall.”

“Let’s just get you inside,” I said, finally getting the door open. As I hauled him in, I said over my shoulder, “Night.”

“Try to behave—” Donovan’s words were cut off as the door slammed shut behind us.

Caleb rested his head against mine as I led him over to the couch, and now that we were finally alone, I could drop the act that apparently had sent him over the edge.

“Someone’s been a very naughty boy tonight,” I said.

“Your fault.”

“Oh yeah? Care to tell me how?” I went to lower him onto the leather cushion, but he twisted out of my grasp, stumbling into the coffee table before righting himself.

“Eeeverybody wants you. And you want eeeverybody.”

Amusement crooked my lips. While I knew he'd wake up regretting all of this tomorrow, tequila had brought the jealousy out of Caleb, and as fucked up as it was, I liked it. It was also cute as hell, because even several sheets to the wind, no one could compare to him in my eyes. He had to know that. Maybe it'd get through to him when he was sober.

For now, I'd play along, because tequila was apparently truth serum.

"Well, you got the first part right. Can you blame them?"

"Yes," he said stubbornly. "I mean, no."

"Which is it?"

"No. They want you. I want you." He ran a frustrated hand through his hair. "And I… I don't know what to do about that."

Well, that was honest. It seemed tequila hadn't only made Caleb fun but introspective.

"I guess maybe the first question then should be, what do you *want* to do about it?"

"Yell?" Caleb suggested. "Scream? This is all so confusing… So… frustrating. All these years I thought you hated me, that I hated you, when really I wanted— Ugh."

He threw his hands up in the air, his frustration getting the best of him as words got jumbled in his inebriated brain.

"I just can't believe that after aaall this time, when I finally say, 'Hey, yeah, I'm open to seeing what this is and letting you be my first,' *you* decide to go and flirt with every available cock in sight."

As Caleb's words filled the space between us, I could barely believe what I was hearing. Drunk or not, this was the first time he'd ever mentioned half of the shit tumbling off his tongue, so how the hell was I supposed to know where his mind was at?

He'd told me to play it cool. I did.

He'd told me to keep my hands to myself. I did—when it came to him.

And I was pretty sure he'd told me to make sure none of our friends worked out what was going on between us. Which. I. Did.

Now he was standing here telling me *I* fucked up tonight? Oh no. I didn't think so.

"Okay, first off," I said, holding up a finger in front of his face that he did his best to focus on, "*you* are the one who has been hellbent on keeping this a secret. If I had *my* way, we would've shown up at that club together tonight. Second…"

I shoved two fingers in Caleb's face, and his eyes narrowed.

"You told me to act normal. Normal for me is man-whoring my way through Manhattan. If I'd changed behavior tonight, people would've gotten suspicious."

"East."

"Yeah, but I'm pretty sure the moment you all but threw down over me on the dance floor, his desire for a forbidden romance was fulfilled. Brotherly love and all."

"Stepbrothers. We aren't related."

"Thank God for that," I said, and took his hand, bringing it down to the hard-on his little display tonight had caused. "Because otherwise this would be really fucking inconvenient."

Caleb's fingers automatically squeezed my stiffening length, and his glassy eyes locked on mine. "This is for me?"

"All for you." I thrust my hips forward into his hand. "Always has been."

"Mmm." Caleb licked his lips. "That's hot."

"So are you." So damn hot I'd almost forgotten where I was going with all of this. But when Caleb let go of me to flick open the button of my pants, my brain switched back on and I took hold of his wrist, halting him.

My last point was the most important I was going to make tonight, and I needed to make it now, before things got out of hand.

"You want me to be your first?"

Caleb rolled his eyes and he did his best to act blasé about the whole thing, even as his cheeks turned several shades of red. "Well, like, with a guy. I'm not a total virgin."

"No?" I'd never imagined for a second that he was. Not with the way girls threw themselves at him. But his need to make that point made him even more adorable. "Thank God, because I only deflower *partial* virgins."

Caleb shoved me in the arm, and I caught his wrist, pulling him in, wrapping my arm around him.

"If I could have danced with you at the club like this tonight, I would have. There'd have been no one else. You know that."

Caleb nodded, but then took a step back, and for a moment I thought he was going to walk away—until his hands went to the bottom of his shirt and he started to unbutton.

Oh shit.

“*Now* you decide to get naked,” I said, trying to keep my tone light and teasing even as my pulse kicked up a few notches. “East will be so disappointed.”

“Fuck East.”

“Never have, never will.” I cocked my head to the side, admiring all the delicious skin he revealed button by button. “But you? I’d love to fuck with you.”

An approving smile spread across Caleb’s lips as he backed away from me.

“Going somewhere?”

He tripped over the edge of the chair, but quickly caught himself and continued in the direction of…my room.

Either his internal compass was all out of whack, or he was thinking I enjoyed drunk, not-all-in-their-right-mind men in my bedroom. Did I want him there? Fuck yes. Was I going to take advantage when he couldn’t even walk in a straight line? Absolutely not.

“Even your room smells good.” He groaned. “Why is everything about you so hot? I hate it.”

“You don’t hate it,” I said, stopping by the bed. “You like it too much, and that scares you.”

Caleb seemed to think that over and then slowly began to nod. “You’ve always wanted this. Me?” He shrugged out of his shirt and balled it up in his hands.

In the dark, I could barely see his gorgeous body, and I reached down to flip on the lamp. The low amber light illuminated his broad shoulders and that sexy chest I wanted to run my hands across.

Cursing the tequila for being a damn cockblock, I gripped the back of my neck so I didn’t reach out for Caleb and take things further than they needed to go.

“You have no fucking idea.”

He threw his shirt at me and spread his hands wide. “Well, tonight you can have him.”

“You or Don Julio?”

“Who’s Donullio?”

I bit back a laugh, because as comical as drunk Caleb was, he was in my room, stripping out of his clothes, and I wouldn’t be able to do a damn thing about it.

My dick was in full riot mode.

"C'mere." He crooked his finger, but I shook my head.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not?" He fumbled with the buttons of his jeans, and it took him a couple tries to get them open.

"Because you're drunk." *And I apparently have morals when it comes to you.*

"Am not," he said, trying to kick off his shoe. "I'm still standing, aren't I?"

They were famous last words, because as soon as he managed to get one shoe off, he fell face-first onto my mattress.

A muffled "Oops" followed by "Mmm, smells good" was all I heard as he lay there, not bothering to lift himself up.

That was the problem with my bed—guys fell into it and never wanted to leave. I always thought it had more to do with me, but considering I wasn't lying there with Caleb, it was probably the fact that it felt like a cloud.

"You okay?" I crouched down beside the bed to be at his eye level, though his were currently shut. "Caleb?"

He made a small noise but didn't open his eyes. I brushed his hair off his face and stayed there just looking at him. Soon his breathing became deeper, slower, as he fell into a heavy sleep.

Had this been what it was like all those times he'd had to take me home? When I called him after one too many and he had to put my intoxicated ass to bed? Had he watched me the way I watched him now? He was so beautiful, with those full lips slightly parted and his dark lashes brushing his cheeks.

"Another time," I whispered, leaning in to kiss his forehead and the corner of his mouth. When he didn't stir, I stood up and took off his other shoe, then pulled the folded blanket from the end of the bed over him. It was too tempting to join him, to move in behind him just so I could hold him all night. But I wanted him fully consenting when that happened.

I watched him in silence for a little longer, and then I flipped off the lamp and let him sleep. Alone.

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TWENTY-SEVEN

caleb

I WOKE UP breathing in Travis's scent. He always smelled so fresh and clean, but there was an undertone in his cologne I couldn't quite place. Whatever it was, it was sexy as hell, and it had to be chock-full of pheromones, because it attracted not only me, but everyone else in New York.

Damn, had I been dreaming about him? It felt like he was right there, wrapped around me. That was something we'd never done before, only ever passing out beside each other in beanbag chairs after a long night playing video games.

This was different. I'd never actively thought of Travis as more than my best friend, but now he was all I could think about. Some kind of switch had been flipped, and I wanted to find out what I'd been missing all these years. I needed to feel his mouth swallowing my cock again. Wondered how it would feel to do the same to him, if I'd even like it.

What was I thinking? Of course I'd fucking like it. Just imagining getting on my knees for him had me so hard I found myself rubbing my dick against the mattress for the friction.

But when I finally opened my eyes, Travis's arm wasn't slung over my waist, and his legs weren't tangled with mine. His erection wasn't nestled against my ass, ready to take me.

The stab of disappointment was short-lived, though, when I realized where I was. Bundled up in a blanket on Travis's bed—without him.

I slowly lifted up onto my elbow and scrubbed a hand over my face. What was I doing in here? *How* did I get in here? And why was I shirtless,

with my pants undone but still on?

One look at the clock told me it was after noon, but I still felt a little groggy as I pulled back the blanket and got to my feet. I headed into his en suite, then splashed some cold water on my face. A quick look in the mirror showed me I'd seen better days, and I seriously needed a shave.

I heard the low sound of the TV and wandered into the living room, where Travis lay awake and spread out on the sofa in nothing but a pair of boxer briefs. The staggering picture he made had me itching to grab my camera, but the moment he saw me, he sat up, swinging his feet out in front of him and patting the cushion beside him.

Sitting didn't sound like a bad idea right about now, and getting close to Travis sounded even better.

I fell onto the couch, and he chuckled, angling his body toward mine.

"You know, it's not right you look so goddamn gorgeous after such a wild night."

"Don't bullshit me. I just saw myself in the mirror." I frowned. "Wild night?"

Travis's brows shot up. "You don't remember?"

Oh God. The way he said it didn't sound promising, and when he smirked and said, "Tequila," I groaned.

"No way I did tequila shots last night."

"You're not feeling it?"

"I mean…" I didn't *think* so. My head was kinda woozy, but I didn't feel like I needed to bend over a toilet and heave the contents of my stomach into it. Thank fuck.

Travis let out a low whistle. "Gotta say, I'm shocked and impressed."

"Why do I feel like you're going to tell me I did something really stupid?"

"Define stupid."

"Oh no." I covered my face with my hands and tried to remember anything from last night. All that came back were pieces of getting ready and heading out to meet them at a club. "Do I even wanna know?"

Travis leaned over and pulled my hands from my face and into his lap. "Well, how should I say this? The jig is up."

"Do what?"

"If you get the urge to hold my hand in front of the others, no one will care. Oh, maybe JT. You might wanna call him later."

All the blood rushed out of my face as I blinked at him. “You’re joking.”

“I’d never joke about you putting your hands on me. It *was* a bit of a surprise when you put your hands on the guy I was dancing with. Especially since you were the one who wanted to keep things a secret.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, back up a minute. I was dancing with some guy?”

“Uh…no. You shoved a guy off me and got all up in his face, ready to rearrange it.”

“Over you?”

A burst of laughter left Travis. “Gee, thanks. Stroke my ego a little more, won’t you? I’ll have you know that in most circles, I’m a catch.”

“I didn’t mean that.” And of course he was a catch—you just had to look at him to know that. “I just… I got violent with someone?”

“Yeah.” Travis smiled. “It was super hot.”

Or seriously fucking stupid. “Were you the only one who saw me?”

Travis opened his mouth, but the amusement twinkling in his eyes made me curse.

“Who else?”

“Everyone.”

“Motherfucker.”

“I think they’re leaning more toward *brotherfucker*. But I could be wrong.”

I shot to my feet, and the room only swayed a little before I began to pace, scrubbing a hand over my face as though it could erase whatever stupid things my mouth had spewed the night before.

Hell, maybe my head in a toilet bowl would’ve been the better option.

“I mean, I wouldn’t worry too much about it,” Travis said. “So they know you and I—”

“Want to fuck?” I whirled around just in time to see Travis widening his legs, and struggled to keep my eyes on his face.

“There it is.”

“There’s what?”

“The words I’ve been waiting all night to hear you say again.”

Again? Wait, I’d told him I wanted to fuck him last night? I narrowed my eyes, and he pushed up from the couch, crossing over to me.

“You don’t remember that either, huh?”

Uh, definitely not.

“Or telling me you were a virgin—”

“What? I’m not a—”

“My bad, that’s not right, we settled on *partial* virgin. You invited me to be your first. Something I take very seriously.”

Okay, was he kidding? Because there was no way…

Was there?

“Oh, then you stripped your shirt off. I’m telling you, you were doing everything you could to seduce me.” He stopped in front of me and reached out to draw a finger down the middle of my chest. “But me, I was a good boy.” Travis looked at me from under hooded lids. “Even when you went into my room and started to take off your jeans.”

“Fucking tequila.”

“I’m thinking of buying stocks in the company.” He leaned in and whispered across my lips, “Especially if it gets you naked in my bed.”

I sighed. “But you left…”

“Only long enough for you to sober up.” Travis unzipped my jeans and nipped at my lower lip. “Why do you think my clothes are off? I’ve been waiting for you to come find me.”

Holy shit. That was so out of character for Travis, or at least, I thought it was. I hardly believed every encounter he’d ever had in the past had been sober. But with me he’d held back, when I’d clearly been throwing myself at him.

Stripping…

Starting fights over him…

Telling him I wanted to fuck him…

I pulled back. “You really slept out here all night?”

“I did. You should be proud. I channeled your inner good vibes and was the epitome of self-restraint. I really do deserve some sort of prize.”

My lips twitched. He was such a fucking smartass, and that just added to his appeal.

“A prize, huh?” I reached for the hand still flirting with the zipper of my jeans and laced our fingers together, walking him backward toward my room. “How does a partial virgin sound? One who’s fully sober and woke up in your bed wishing you were there with him?”

“I mean, I *was* a very, very good boy.”

“I’m impressed, but could you do me a favor?” Travis cocked his head to the side, and I winked. “Leave the good boy out here.”

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TWENTY-EIGHT

travis

I'D BEEN THINKING about this moment all night. Despite telling him I'd been waiting for him to come and find me, I'd fully expected this scenario to stay locked in my Caleb fantasy vault once he woke up and realized what he'd done.

But no. He'd barely been bothered about his epic show last night, more disappointed that I hadn't been in bed with him when he woke up.

Was this really happening? He was tugging me into his bedroom? *And* he wanted me to leave any good-guy pretenses at the door?

Like I had any, but still.

Fuck it, it was *on*.

With his fingers entwined with mine, he led me past his bed and into the en suite.

I could work with this.

"Feeling a little filthy?" I said as he let go of my hand to turn the shower on.

"You're not?"

"I didn't say—" My words came to an abrupt end as Caleb unzipped his pants and shoved them, along with his boxer briefs, down and stepped out of them.

I just hoped he realized what he was provoking. "Caleb?"

"Hmm?" He straightened to his full height, and when his delicious cock rose with him, it took everything I had to say the next three words.

"Are you sure?"

He wrapped his hand around his dick and gave it a nice, long pull, and fuck me, I'd never wanted to hear the word *yes* more in my life.

"Yeah, I'm sure. I just wanna play with you, if—"

My mouth on his cut off his words before he could finish them, because there was no need. I'd wanted Caleb for as long as I could remember, and I wasn't about to let anything as mundane as small talk get in the way of finally having him again.

His lips parted eagerly under mine, and his tongue slipped inside my mouth to seek me out. That he was the one taking what he wanted only ramped up the hotness of the moment.

Caleb wanted me. That much was clear when he let himself go and took hold of my hips, drawing me forward to rub his erection up against mine. I cursed at the fabric barrier preventing the skin-on-skin contact I so desperately wanted, and like he could read my mind, Caleb slipped his fingers inside the waistband and began to push them off my hips.

"These need to go," he said as he shoved them down under my ass.

"A-fucking-men to that."

I reluctantly let him go, but only long enough to get my briefs gone, and once I was free I reached for the back of his neck, pulling him in close for another kiss. Caleb groaned into my mouth, gliding his hands down my sides to my ass as he began to walk us back into the enormous shower I'd imagined him in too many times to count.

The steam swirled around us as we made it inside the tiled sanctuary, and I could already tell it was about to become the backdrop for one of my all-time favorite fantasies come true.

The water hit Caleb's back first, and my hands followed. His body felt amazing, tall and sinewy—he fit against me perfectly as he stopped where the spray was hitting his lower back and took hold of my face. Then Caleb angled his head and thrust his tongue deep into my mouth.

I dug my fingers into the sweet curves of his ass, and as I pulled him to me, our cocks slid up against each other—his, nice and long, thick and veiny; mine, hard as steel, flushed, and dripping pre-cum as I rubbed all over him, and imagined doing the same to his mouth.

Caleb tore his lips from mine, then reached between us and fingered the silver ring at the head of my dick. "I fucking love this piercing."

I grunted as he continued to play with it, exploring the piece of jewelry with a tentative touch, and I took his hand and applied more pressure.

“You don’t have to be so gentle.” Caleb’s eyes flew to mine, and I couldn’t help my smirk. “I like it a little rough.”

A curious gleam twinkled in those deep brown depths. “Define a little.”

“Hard to put into words, really. But let’s just say you can do whatever you like to me.” I leaned in and licked a path up his cheek to his ear. “With you, I want it all.”

“Fuck.” Caleb’s hand wrapped around me, and the feel of his hot palm squeezing me tight made my cock pound. “I don’t know where to start.”

I shuffled in closer to him and put my lips to his neck, moving my hands back to his ass. “Start wherever you like. Everything you do is going to feel fucking amazing.”

“How do you know?” Caleb said as he gave a slow, hard pull of my dick.

I leaned back a fraction. “Because just the smell of your soap is enough to make me come all over you. Anything beyond that is a bonus.”

Caleb smiled. “My soap?”

“Yep. You’ve been using the same shit since I’ve known you, and I gotta say, it’s really inconvenient to pop a semi when a stranger walks past smelling like you.”

“You do not.”

“I do, and let’s not even talk about the grocery store…”

“Shut up. When was the last time you ever set foot in a grocery store?”

He had a point, but… “It *would* be inconvenient if I were to go to one.”

Caleb chuckled, then turned me until my back was up against the tiled wall. “You’re ridiculous.”

“And you’re fucking hot. So is it really that difficult to believe I get hard picturing you running that body wash all over yourself?”

Caleb turned and reached for the bottle of soap on the ledge. “This one?”

He popped the top, and the second he waved it under my nose, my toes curled and my dick jerked. I reached down and clamped a hand around it.

“Holy shit, you were telling the truth.”

“Yeah, I was.” I rested my head back against the wall and gave myself a hard pull.

Caleb licked at the condensation beading his top lip and tipped the bottle up, pouring some of the soap into his hand. “Then I think I know exactly where I want to start.”

“You do?” I said as he put the bottle back on the shelf.

“I do.” He stepped in front of me, his dick jutting out like it wanted to play, then he began to run his hands over my chest, soaping me up. “I’m going to clean you up, rinse you down, then…” He brushed his lips over mine. “I’m going to make you dirty all over again.”

Oh, fuck yes. I didn’t have one damn complaint about that.

Caleb lowered his eyes back to where his hands were massaging their way down my body, making sure to get my skin all lathered up. His touch was sure but also exploratory as he grazed his thumbs over my nipples, his lust overriding any self-doubt he might have about being with a guy like this.

All these firsts...with me. A kiss. A hand job. Whatever came next...other than me.

All of those things were a heavy burden to carry for someone, and something I’d pretty much avoided since my own years ago. But Caleb was trusting me with this, and now that he was finally opening up and navigating this side of our relationship, I wasn’t going to fuck things up.

I was going to make every moment we were together as amazing and memorable for him as I knew it would be for me.

As he continued to make his way down my body to where I was stroking myself, he batted my hand out of the way and took my hard length in his slippery palm. I sucked in a breath.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” he said, his voice a breathy kind of sigh. “I want to do this right, make you feel good.”

A strangled chuckle left me at that, because if he made me feel any better, I might just die from the experience. “Anything you do is going to feel right.”

“I’m being serious.”

“So am I.” I reached down with both hands and held his in place as I thrust forward, tunneling through his fist. “The other day in the library, I came in two seconds from just a touch. Trust me when I say it’s taking everything I have not to explode all over you now that you’re naked *and* touching me. I don’t think you realize just how fucking much I want you.”

A shiver rippled over his skin, and Caleb looked down my body to where my piercing shone like a beacon under the lights in the shower.

“You think you can hold off long enough to let me get a better look at that?”

“If I can’t, I’ll die trying.”

The next thing I knew, Caleb knelt where the suds were pooling at my feet. And *fuck*, the sight of him in front of me almost made my knees buckle.

He was so damn gorgeous, better than any dream I’d had of him, as damp strands of his hair stuck to his forehead and he angled my dick so he could finger the ring adorning the leaking tip.

The scent of his soap filled my nostrils as Caleb ran his thumb down the underside of my shaft to fondle my balls, his fingers slipping and sliding, teasing the most sensitive part of my body.

I grunted with pleasure. “Someone clearly knows what he likes when he’s alone.”

Caleb looked up at me. “I’ve definitely had more practice lately… Thank you for that.”

“Fucking hell.”

His smile turned wicked then, tugging up the corner of his mouth. “Am I allowed to touch you here?” He gently pushed a fingertip between my ass cheeks, making me curse as my hips arched forward. “Is that a yes?”

“That’s a *hell* yes.”

He chuckled, then slipped his digit along my hot channel, and I widened my legs for him, wanting to give him the best access possible.

“I… I know what I want to do to you. But is that what you want?”

If it was putting his finger inside me, he had *no* idea. I wanted him to slide that finger deep in my ass and stretch me wide enough that he could then sink his dick in.

But I wasn’t sure he was ready to hear that just yet—he seemed a little unsure. So I decided to ease him in another way. Make him really want me before blowing his mind.

I reached for the handheld shower head and leaned back against the wall, angling it down my body. His eyes shifted to my soapy dick as rivulets of water began to wash the suds away and leave my cock wet and his for the taking.

Then I licked my lips and told him exactly what I wanted.

“I want you to finish doing what you promised. You cleaned me up, I rinsed me down, and now you have to get me dirty all over again.”

I put the spray back and threaded my fingers through his slick hair, and Caleb braced his hands on my thighs, his eyes darkening as I gripped my

cock, brushing my sticky piercing over his lower lip.

“You told me to leave the good boy outside. Did you mean that?”

“Yes.”

“Then suck my dick.”

Caleb’s nostrils flared, and just when I thought I might’ve pushed too hard after all, he opened his mouth and flicked his tongue over the sensitive tip of my cock, making my balls scrunch up tight against my body.

How in the hell was it that he had the ability to make me lose my cool with one touch, one lick, one fucking look?

But I was determined tonight. I would not come until I was in his mouth, and those lips were sucking on me like I was his favorite Popsicle on a summer day—which, by the way, was orange. I knew that because I’d spent way too many hours watching him eat those on the rooftop when we were younger. “Christ, Caleb—” the feel of his mouth around me was fucking torture.

I tightened my grip on his hair as he grunted in response, and I loosened my hold and pulled out, letting him catch his breath for a second. But just a second. I was too impatient, his mouth was too sweet, and I didn’t want to risk coming anywhere other than on his tongue.

If he let me.

Caleb parted his lips and dug his fingers into my thighs as I directed my dick along his tongue, and when he began to suck, my eyes slammed shut.

I’d known this would be an exercise in restraint from the minute Caleb moved to his knees. But as the muffled hums and sucking sounds he made echoed off the tiled walls, my control was quickly slipping away.

“Caleb, fuck, I want—”

He drew his lips off me with a satisfying *pop*.

“What do you want?”

Jesus, his voice was like gravel as he looked up my body, his eyes full of lust as his hand continued to fondle me.

“I want to come in your mouth.”

“Not on my face?”

Fuck, was he serious? The arrogant tilt to his chin said he was, which conjured up just about the hottest image ever and also landed me in a *bit* of a conundrum.

“I mean, can’t I do both? This doesn’t have to be a one-time thing, does it?”

“True.” Caleb licked his lower lip. “So, which one do you want to do first?”

I studied his face, those dark eyes, his masculine jaw, but what I kept coming back to were those fuckable lips. If there was one thing I was going to do right now, it was come while inside them.

“Open your mouth.” I speared my fingers back into his hair and pulled his face forward, feeding my dick between his lips. I kept on like that, tunneling in and out of his mouth rougher than I probably should’ve, since it was his first time. But Caleb’s hands were on my ass, his strong grip urging me to continue plundering his greedy mouth as lust overrode all common sense and I let go.

My chest heaved with every breath, and as my climax raced down my spine, Caleb slipped his fingers between my ass cheeks.

“Gonna come,” I warned him, though he seemed too far gone to care, as his eyes fluttered closed and he continued sucking.

I watched his cock drip pre-cum all over the tiled floor, and when his finger brushed over my hole, my entire body stiffened. My hips snapped forward, Caleb swallowed on pure instinct, and the tight constriction of his throat around my tip had me coming in strong, rapid bursts inside his mouth.

My shouts bounced off the walls as I poured every last drop into him, my cum leaking out the corners of his lips and down his chin—and then hot, sticky fluid hit my toes and I knew he’d just come right along with me.

It was the hottest moment of my life—hell, every time with Caleb was hotter than the last—and when I finally pulled out of his swollen mouth and slumped back against the wall, he rested back on his heels and stared up at me with a look of pure satisfaction: *Yeah, I did that.*

And damn if I couldn’t wait for him to do it all over again.

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TWENTY-NINE

caleb

WELL, *THIS* WAS going to be interesting.

A last-minute change in Vera's shooting schedule had pushed family dinner to tonight, which meant all I was going to be able to think about when I looked at Travis across the table was how much I would rather be eating him.

Going down on a partner had always done it for me, but sucking Travis's dick, wrangling those shouts out of him, was like nothing I'd ever experienced before. Even on my knees, I'd felt so fucking high. I loved the way he tasted. How his cock was both velvety soft and hard as steel on my tongue. I wanted to tease that piercing of his again just to see if I could get him off with a few focused flicks, then give in to all the untamed thoughts that were running through my mind now. And I wanted him watching me with those hungry eyes that urged me on.

"You've got to stop looking at me like that." Travis glanced up at the private elevator's camera in the corner as we headed up to our parents' penthouse.

Right. And I couldn't exactly touch him here. This should've been the slap in the face that I needed to remind me I really shouldn't be touching him at all, but something about this being a secret only the two of us knew had all the blood rushing from my head into my dick.

Travis groaned and closed his eyes. "I fucking mean it. This is already gonna be torture."

With his head back and the normally smooth lines of his neck corded with tension, I had to bite back a smile. I made him as riled up as he did me,

and that was a boost to my ego. Finally we were on the same page, and I would've given anything to have taken things further once we got out of the shower.

"I was just thinking about…later," I said.

"Later?" He licked his lips like he already knew what I was thinking. "What do you—"

The elevator dinged, cutting off his question.

Travis shook his head at me, like I'd been the only one to start this up, and ran a hand over his face. He muttered, "Jesus Christ," and then pushed off the wall of the car and stalked into the penthouse.

I didn't think he could hear my answering chuckle at his frustration as I followed after him, because a few seconds later he put on an utterly charming tone as he greeted Dad and Vera.

"Daaamn, Mom, look at you. You could be my sister with those bangs."

"You like them? They're for a new role, and I wasn't sure if they fit my face or not," she said.

"You look stunning, as always. Well, maybe not including the wig you had for *Maybe, Baby*. Short red curls are not your thing."

"I don't think I saw that one?" Dad said, and Vera shook her head.

"And you won't." Her expression changed when I walked into the room and she smiled. "Caleb, hi, honey."

I greeted her with a kiss to the cheek. "Travis is right, you look great."

Vera's lips pursed as she exchanged a glance with Dad. "Did he just say Travis is right?"

"Did they just come in together?" Dad added.

We'd definitely come together in *all* the ways. But if I thought about that too long, things would get embarrassing fast. Instead, I focused on my dad's face, because the only other option was to look at Vera, and Travis was standing with her, which would bring me right back to thinking about the two of us coming together.

"Caleb?"

"Huh?"

"I asked if you and Travis arrived together?"

"Oh, yeah." I shrugged, trying for nonchalance. "Not all that crazy, since you forced us to live together."

"*Forced* is a little harsh, don't you think?"

"You *sold* my place."

“Something that was necessary. We explained that. And anyway, you two haven’t killed each other yet, so I think we’re onto something. Travis?” Dad turned in his and Vera’s direction. “I hope you’ve welcomed Caleb and not made the move too hard on him.”

“I’ve been nothing but…wel*coming*.”

Was it my imagination, or did he emphasize *coming*? I chanced a look at our parents, who didn’t seem bothered at all. But one look in Travis’s direction told me he’d definitely added that for my benefit.

“Trust me,” he continued, “I didn’t make things any harder for him than he did me.”

A strangled kind of cough left me. The sexy fucker was paying me back for the elevator.

“Oh no.” Vera frowned. “Are you coming down with something?”

“No, just, um… Got a tickle in my throat,” I replied.

Travis eyed me with a devious twinkle. “That’s what’s down your throat?”

“Travis, don’t start.” His mom admonished him. “What else would it be?”

Travis shrugged, trying for the innocent act. Though I wasn’t even sure he knew what that was. “I don’t know. Maybe he put something in his mouth that he shouldn’t.”

“He’s not five.”

“Okay.” Dad finally stepped in, likely thinking he was preventing some kind of blow-up. But what he was really stopping was an explosion of a different variety. One that happened whenever I thought about Travis’s dick down my thro—

“Why don’t I get us all a drink?” he asked.

“Perfect,” Vera said, and moved toward the bar, my dad following.

Travis lingered behind, so I made my way over to him, wanting to get as close as I could without touching.

“You’re an asshole,” I muttered, and he chuckled.

“I’m just paying you back. You shouldn’t start something if you aren’t prepared to see it through.”

“You don’t think I can keep up with you?”

“Oh, I know you can keep it up *with* me. I’ve seen the proof. But can you sit through a whole family meal that way?” Travis leaned over and put

his lips by my ear. “Little secret? I’ve been doing it for years now, so I’m a pro.”

Fuck, that was hot. The idea he would sit across from me, wanting me that way. *Jesus.*

“Come on, stepbrother. Dinner’s about to be served.”

I CUT INTO the chicken parmesan and brought it up to my lips, only to hesitate when I remembered Vera was into saving the chickens now.

Travis smirked at the forkful hovering in front of my mouth. “Still on the plant-based kick, Mom?”

“It’s not a kick, it’s a way of life,” she said, before taking a sip of her wine. “But since you two seem to have an aversion to something better for you, yours are the real thing.”

I narrowed my eyes, not sure I believed that. Travis shrugged, took a bite, and then gave me a quick nod to go ahead.

I still didn’t trust it, since that shit tasted real last time, but fuck it.

“I’ve gotta say, I’m pleasantly surprised not to get any phone calls from Astor or the Towers recently,” Dad said to Travis, and then he gestured toward me with his knife. “See? Good influence.”

Oh, I was a fucking great one. And thinking of Travis’s words about giving me a little payback only made me want to make sure he knew I could more than hold my own when it came to him. I moved my foot up the inside of Travis’s calf, rubbing it up and down, and his head shot up.

He lifted his napkin to his mouth and cleared his throat. “Yes, he’s definitely been rubbing off on me.”

I kicked him in the shin for that, but Dad and Vera seemed only too pleased that we were getting along.

“As a matter of fact,” Travis continued, “he actually got me to go to the library.”

Vera’s eyes widened. “You? In a library?”

“I know. I was surprised too, but he really gave me the helping hand I needed.”

I choked on my beer and had to cough into my napkin to keep it from dribbling down my chin. That fucker. He was too good at this.

He brought another bite of chicken to his lips. Under the table, his foot found mine, and he left it there to drive me crazy.

“So, Vera, when do you leave?” I said, ready for a subject change that didn’t have me needing to shift in my seat to ease the pressure on my restrained cock.

“Tomorrow. Your dad’s coming with me for the first couple of weeks—”

“That’s great.”

“—which means we won’t be here for your birthday next week. We’d love to plan something for when we get back—”

“No, no, don’t worry about it,” I said, waving her off. “We don’t need to do anything.”

“Of course we do. Tell him what we were thinking, Richard.”

Dad set his fork down and gave his wine a swirl. “It would be closer to the end of October before we get back, but the weather should be great then. We can rent the rooftop bar at Le Bain, invite all your friends—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” I shook my head. “I appreciate the thought, but I really don’t want to make it a big deal.”

“Oh.” Dad frowned. “Some place smaller, then?”

“Or we could just put a candle in the tiramisu tonight and be done with it.”

I could feel Travis’s eyes on me, and when I didn’t look at him, he rubbed his foot up my leg.

That got my attention.

“You don’t want a party?” he asked. “Not even with a bunch of hot blondes and an open tequila bar?”

He was such a shit. But two could play at that game. “The blondes could be fun. But the last time I had tequila I woke up in a strange bed, so—”

“You *what*?”

My dad’s shocked voice had my smartass retort coming to a screeching halt. I was supposed to be the *good* influence.

“Uh, well, it’s not as bad as it sounds.”

“Oh?” Travis slumped down into his chair and rolled his eyes, playing up his disinterest. But the foot he slid up my leg so he could toe my balls told a completely different story. “Sounds pretty bad to me. What kind of respectable man wakes up in a stranger’s bed?”

I grunted to stop the groan that wanted to escape and did my best to glare him to death.

“Travis,” Vera said, “I don’t think we need *your* input on this. It has nothing to do with you.”

Travis tongued his lower lip but nodded. “You’re right. I’ll behave.”

Sure he would. I doubted Travis even knew the meaning of the word unless it was preceded by *mis*.

“Caleb.” My dad’s voice took on that low, serious tone that he usually reserved for telling Travis he was a complete and utter delinquent. If he’d been able to see what Travis was doing at this very second beneath the table, I had no doubt that’s where his attention would be focused.

However, I was the one who’d put my foot in my mouth for everyone to see. While *Travis* was the one with his foot in my lap for no one to see.

Yeah, he was sooo much better at this than me.

“We didn’t send you to live at the Towers so you could start acting like —” He paused and looked over at Travis, who pointed to himself, eyes wide.

“Me?” He shook his head, but his foot kept on fucking moving. “I don’t think so. Remember, not one call.”

“You’re right.”

Travis’s foot angled forward then, applying pressure to my throbbing cock, and my utensils clanged to the table as I grunted in an effort to smother a groan.

Vera looked over at me. “Caleb, honey, are you sure you’re not coming down with something? You seem so out of sorts tonight.”

“I’m fine.” I glanced at Travis, who was looking at me over the rim of his glass. “But you might be right. I am feeling a little bit hot.”

“Oh no.” She brought a hand to my forehead and nodded. “You do seem a little flushed.”

“Yeah,” I muttered, promising myself I was going to make Travis pay for this. “I feel it.”

“Well, that’s a shame. We have box seat tickets for all of us to that new Broadway show tonight.”

Travis slid his foot to the ground and jackknifed up straight in his seat, whipping his head in his mom’s direction. “A show? Tonight?”

Had I not been busy trying to calm the pounding hard-on he’d stroked to life beneath the table, I might’ve laughed at how put out he sounded by Vera’s suggestion, at the idea of having to sit next to each other through an entire show and not touch.

It seemed his little tease-and-torture session might've just bit him in the ass.

"Well, not anymore. I think we should stay in, make sure Caleb is okay."

"Oh, he's fine." Travis waved me off without even looking my way. "Why don't you and Dick go?"

"But—"

"I'll make sure Caleb is…taken care of."

Would it have been too obvious if I groaned right then? Because I knew exactly what track Travis's mind was on, and it wasn't the "check his temperature and bring him a washcloth" kind.

Vera looked up the table to where my dad had just finished his meal. "What do you think, Richard?"

"I think they're old enough to look after each other and get home. Or you could stay here in your old rooms."

A hint of a wicked smile tugged at Travis's lips. "Yeah, we'll work it out. Caleb can rest up a little while I…clean up."

"Okay." Dad looked to me and shook a finger. "But I don't want to hear any more stories about you waking up in stranger's beds. You two seem to have worked things out, and I'm pleased about that, but I don't want you to lose track of your studies."

"You're right. I'll be sure to only fall asleep in our condo every night."

I was sure not to specify *my* bed, because if I didn't have to lie, I wasn't going to. But when I looked at a smirking Travis, it was clear he knew what I meant.

"Very good," Dad said, and pushed back from the table. "Well, Vera, it looks like you and I are going on a date."

"So it does." She got to her feet, and as the two of them left to go and freshen up before leaving, she called back, "You two behave yourselves, and Travis? Be sure to look after Caleb."

Travis looked at me across the now-empty table and licked his lips. "Oh, I'm gonna take good care of him tonight."

My dick jerked behind my jeans, and with our parents in the other room, I could finally reach down under the table and rub my palm over it. "Yeah?"

"Yeah, real fucking good care."

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THIRTY

travis

CALEB HAD MADE a valiant effort, I'd give him that. The slip-up about waking up in a stranger's bed had been entertaining, but of course he hadn't caught shit in the way I would have if it came out of my mouth.

Didn't matter. He was looking at me like he wanted to take me right here on the table and—

Oh fuck. How could I make him take me on the table?

Too far, Travis, too far.

But I'd seen the way his nose flared when I mentioned taking very good care of him tonight, and if that was what he wanted, then hell yeah I could make it happen.

Our parents took their sweet-ass time grabbing their things, and I held my breath—and Caleb's stare—until they were in the elevator.

The second I heard them start to descend, I made my move, but Caleb beat me to it, the impatient, gorgeous fucker. Then again, I'd stroked his dick to life, getting him hot and ready just to tease his ass, but having the place to ourselves was working in my favor.

Caleb was on his feet and reaching across the table for me before I could move. He grabbed the front of my shirt and hauled me in only inches from his face.

"You're such an asshole," he said, just before his mouth crashed down on mine.

I hadn't realized how starved I'd been for another taste of him until now. It was a dangerous craving, one so all-consuming I didn't let myself

think too hard about it. I held his head between my palms as I stood up to meet him, and then thrust my tongue inside, claiming him once again.

God, the way he attacked me right back, no hesitation, just a desperate, head-spinning kiss that matched my own, made my entire body come alive.

I speared my fingers through his hair, angling his head so I could kiss along his neck. “I told you it’d be harder than you thought.”

“How the fuck did you do it all this time?”

“No choice. You didn’t want me like that.”

Caleb groaned as I sucked the sensitive skin beneath his ear. “I want you now.”

The fact that my cock didn’t punch through my pants at that was a goddamn miracle. The restraint that had been holding me back snapped like a twig, and I ripped my mouth away to shove everything in front of us off the table. Caleb’s eyes widened as plates and utensils went flying, clattering to the floor.

“By now, you better mean right fucking now.” I reached for the back collar of my shirt and pulled it over my head.

He cursed, his ravenous stare trailing my body as I tossed the shirt. His chest rose and fell with his heavy breaths. “They might come back.”

“Then we’ll tell ’em we had a food fight.” I flicked open the button of my pants. “You scared?”

Caleb licked his lips and removed his shirt, giving me the view I would’ve begged for in about five more seconds. “That’s not the word for what I’m feeling right now.”

“No? Hmm, let’s see.” I jerked my zipper down. “I heard you’ve got a fever. My diagnosis is that it’s because you’re seriously fucking hot for me.”

“Oh yeah? And what do you plan to do about it?”

“First we need to get you out of those clothes.”

No sooner were the words out of my mouth than he shoved his jeans down his hips. A wet mark smeared the front of his boxer briefs where his dick tented the material, and now he knew exactly how it felt to sit across from him at one of these dinners.

Torture. Pure fucking torture.

I rounded the table, moving directly in front of him as he turned to face me. “Ah, yes. I can see exactly what you need.” Sliding my hands inside his

briefs, I lowered them, and once they were past his ass, he surprised me by hopping up to sit on the table.

“Keep going.”

He didn’t have to ask twice, because I didn’t plan to stop—not until he reached his limit, because with Caleb, I wasn’t sure *I* ever would.

I continued to drag his briefs down his legs, and when I was eye level with his cock, I licked the bead of pre-cum glistening on the tip.

Caleb white-knuckled the edge of the table and cursed.

The taste of him was so intoxicating it was all I could do to finish stripping him naked to get this started. But when I got to my feet, Caleb shook his head.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” he said, looking pointedly at the pants I still wore.

“That a problem? Feeling impatient?”

He gripped his cock at the base and gave himself a rough stroke. “Or I could just get myself off, if you’re not interested.”

I got rid of my clothes in a fucking heartbeat, and once I was fully naked, I pushed him back on the table.

I only took a second to admire the way he looked laid out, all those hard muscles tensed and ready. Had the anticipation not been killing me, I could’ve stared at him all night. But I needed to touch him too badly.

I climbed up over him, straddled his waist, and forced his arms up over his head. Keeping my hands on his wrists, I leaned down to kiss him deep and began to move my hips, writhing over him, rubbing my leaking dick against his.

Caleb made an incoherent sound that I swallowed before repeating the move. His arms strained against my hold, like he wanted them free to touch me. I held him down tighter, running my cock along his, the pre-cum from both of us giving a sweet slide.

I let go of one of his wrists and reached between us to wrap my hand around both of our rock-hard lengths. We were too thick for my fingers to get anywhere near touching, but the squeeze of pressure felt so damn good that Caleb slapped his free hand against the table.

“Oh shit—” His words cut off as he sucked in a sharp breath and arched his hips, like he wanted even more.

“I remember you like that,” I murmured, before letting go of his other wrist so I could use both hands to work us over. He grasped my thighs and

lifted his head so he could watch the action.

“It just feels so fucking good.”

Damn, that was such a turn-on. So was the way he kept thrusting up into my hand. He was watching every move I made with an intense focus that ramped my desire so fast and hard that if I didn’t tread carefully here, this would end too soon.

And greedy bastard that I was, I wanted more. So much more. If I had my way, I’d tell him to fuck me right here on this table, to make it so good neither of us would ever be able to look at it again without coming in our pants.

Caleb’s fingers dug into my thighs almost painfully and he let out a choked, “What?”

I froze. Had I said that out loud?

He reached up, gripped the back of my neck, and pulled me down until my lips hovered over his. “You want me to fuck you? Right here, right now?”

Yep. He’d heard me. The last remaining bit of caution I had about not pushing Caleb too far, too soon flew out the window at the lust glazing his eyes.

“Hell yes.” My lips grazed his and I didn’t know who trembled, if it was me, him, or hell, it could’ve been both of us. “Tell me you want that. To be deep inside me, making me come all over our parents’ dining room table.”

“Travis… Shit.” His fingers tightened on my neck, and he closed the distance between us with a harsh kiss. His tongue ran along the seam of my lips, forcing its way into my mouth so he could devour me in a way that felt a hell of a lot like he was saying *yes* to me. And if that didn’t tell me, the slap he gave my ass did, followed by his command to, “Get on your goddamn knees.”

I shifted off him so he could sit up, but the two of us being six feet and sprawled across the table not meant for two bodies to lay across it made it a tight fit.

Much like Caleb was going to find my ass to be in three…two…

I dropped down onto my hands and knees as he moved in behind me.

“Dammit,” he said. “Tell me you left some lube in your room upstairs.”

I snorted. “You can put it in me fucking raw and I’ll still beg for it. Don’t worry.”

“Travis. I don’t wanna hurt you.”

“Remember? I don’t mind it rough.” But to appease him, I leaned over the edge of the table and grabbed my pants. Good thing I never went anywhere without supplies, especially now that Caleb was interested in my dick.

And, thank good God almighty, my ass.

I slapped a couple condoms and some pocket lube packets on the table as I moved back to all fours. My ass clenched in eager anticipation, and I had to force myself to breathe.

He wanted me to be his first, but if I had things my way, I’d be his last.

His hands smoothed over my firm cheeks, and then he kneaded the muscles, plumping me with his strong fingers.

That’s it. Look and explore all you want.

Hot breath against my skin was the only warning I got before he sank his teeth into me, biting hard enough that he’d leave a mark.

And I was so ravenous all I could think was how I couldn’t wait to see the evidence of that bite tomorrow. If he wanted to leave more marks, I’d eagerly take them.

He licked over the tender spot and then his hands were gone and I heard the rip of the packets being opened. A few cool drops of liquid landed along the top of my ass, and a few seconds later they were joined by Caleb’s fingers teasing along the crease.

“You’re so fucking sexy like this.” He trailed a finger along my perineum slowly, making me moan with need.

Without thinking, I pushed back on him, wanting more, and he chuckled low in his throat.

“Now who’s impatient?” With one hand spreading me open, he glided his finger back up to rub against my entrance. The lube made it easier for his long digit to slide past the barrier, pushing inside me until I felt his hand bottom out against my ass.

Shit, I hadn’t expected him to want to explore. Just when I didn’t think this could get any hotter.

“You’re so tight.” He slid his finger in and out, soon adding another.

“So tight for a big-ass bottom, you mean?”

Caleb smacked my ass and shoved a third inside, making all my breath whoosh out. I dropped my head to hide my grin and watched my excited cock drip onto the shiny wood.

“Yes, please, may I have another?” Taunting him was the only way to keep my orgasm at bay, because there was no way I was coming before he got inside me.

I rocked back on his fingers, chasing them when he tried to pull them out, clenching my ass tight.

“Fuck, if you do that to my dick, this’ll all be over,” he warned.

I met his eyes over my shoulder. “Sounds like a challenge to me.”

He twisted his lips, shaking his head as he replaced his fingers with his lubed cock, pressing his plump head against my hole and waiting for entry.

Deep breath in…and out.

On my exhale I shoved back on him, hard enough to force his steel dick to penetrate me several inches.

The words that came out of Caleb then weren’t in any language I’d ever heard, and I took advantage of his momentary surprise to push back again so he was balls deep inside me.

Caleb was inside me.

I let that sink in for the minute he took to get himself back under control. His hand flattened along my spine, holding me still, and I fought the urge to send him over the edge by squeezing around him.

Not until he fucks me.

Focusing on keeping my hands braced on the table was a lesson in patience, when all I suddenly wanted to do was look at him as he pounded into me. But he might think it was too intimate being face to face. Better to let him feast his eyes on my ass.

It *was* pretty damn spectacular.

Caleb bent down by my ear, his voice coming out strangled. “Do that again and I won’t let you come.” To prove his point, he reached around and pinched the head of my dick.

Pain lanced through me, joining the pleasure I was feeling from my full ass, and I licked my lips, welcoming both. If he thought I wasn’t into anything and everything with him, he’d soon find out.

And bossy top Caleb was doing all kinds of crazy shit to my insides.

“Well then,” I said, turning my head so our lips brushed. “You’d better get to fucking moving.”

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THIRTY-ONE

caleb

I SUCKED TRAVIS'S pillow-soft bottom lip into my mouth and nibbled on it as I tried to will my body into submission. I couldn't think about how unbelievable it felt to be inside him or how his tight ass had my cock in a chokehold I never wanted to escape from.

I just had to breathe for a goddamn minute.

Easier said than done with the scent of his cologne filling my lungs and his talented tongue licking into my mouth.

How had I ever denied wanting him? It seemed unfathomable now. We fit together so perfectly, like two pieces of a puzzle that had been pushed around and forced to merge with different parts, when all one needed was the other.

Slowly, I regained my self-control and rocked myself into his hot channel, back and forth, inch by delicious inch, savoring the way he felt wrapped around me. Shit, it wasn't like this was the first time I'd done this. There'd been a few times with other girls, but this was nothing like that. I'd barely gotten started, and that fact was already permanently seared into my brain. With every small thrust, all those memories of anyone before him disappeared, until all I could see, all I could feel and think about, was Travis.

"Are you trying to kill me?" Travis's breath teased my lips as he pulled back from our kiss.

I opened my eyes and stopped moving. "What?"

He wiggled his ass and squeezed around me. "Do I need to show you how this works, or you think you can pound me into tomorrow?"

“I think if you keep talkin’, it won’t be your ass I’m shoving my cock into.” I rocked against him again just to rile him up.

“What if I want both?”

I felt him clamp down around me again, and that was it. I wasn’t about to let him flip the script and top from the bottom. He wanted me to fuck him so hard he never forgot it, then I’d make sure he left his handprints imprinted on the surface of this table.

I rose up behind him, grabbed either side of his hips, and drew myself out to the tip. The loss was immediate, almost painful, until I plowed back inside him all the way to the hilt.

He made a noise low in his throat. “Fuck yes.” He chased me back when I started to pull out of him again. But he wasn’t the one in charge here, and that power gave me a high that rivaled being inside him.

Keeping one hand on his hip to steady myself, I flattened the other against his lower back, then smoothed it up his spine with a heavy pressure to hold him down right where he was. His short hair brushed my fingers as I gripped the back of his neck tight.

Then I did exactly what we both wanted. I began to move.

I shoved into him hard and fast, starting a relentless pace that he seemed to relish, judging by the sounds I was ripping out of him.

God, it was hot. I couldn’t take my eyes off the way my cock disappeared between the flushed, round cheeks of his ass. It swallowed me whole and begged for all I had to give.

“You feel…so damn good.” I barely recognized the ragged sound of my voice over our skin slapping with every thrust and our breathless panting as we matched rhythm.

“I know.” I caught a glimpse of the smug, taunting grin on his lips as he looked back at me, and I tightened my hold on his neck.

Shifting position, I lowered down over him, my bare chest to his solid back, so I could reach around and milk his dick. The head was already nice and wet, giving my fist a smooth slide down his stiff length.

He mumbled something incoherent and angled his head to the side for me when I tucked my face into the spot where his shoulder met his neck. As I jerked him off, I licked and sucked along his skin, filling myself head to toe with every part of Travis I could get. And still it wasn’t enough. It was like I needed to claim him, to know no one else could ever have these parts of him again.

His powerful muscles flexed beneath me, and it was so different to the softness I was used to.

But I loved it, fucking *loved* that we could be rough with each other, that he'd welcome whatever I gave. I wondered what it would feel like to have him deep inside me this way, to feel that sexy piercing of his hitting my G-spot with every thrust. If I'd like him filling me. If *he* would.

God, just imagining Travis fucking me made my cock lurch inside him like that was actually about to happen.

Guess that answered the what-ifs.

Spurred on now, craving release, I propelled my hips forward. Travis's appetite was as voracious as mine, and he impaled himself on my cock every time I lifted up. It was frenzied and uninhibited, and with every thrust, the table groaned beneath us and moved across the floor a few inches.

"Shit," I said, just now noticing in my lust-filled haze. "I'm not stopping."

"You better fucking not."

Our sweat and his pre-cum dripping down onto the table made it a slippery slide for Travis's hands as he tried to keep himself braced on all fours. His fingers skidded off the table suddenly, but he caught himself, holding position with those carved-from-stone abs.

But we needed to move.

We must've had the idea at the same time, because when I shifted my hand from his neck to his chest to haul him up on his knees, he was already lifting himself, plastering his back to my front so there was nothing between us and reaching back to curl his fingers in my hair.

"Oh Jesus Christ." The guttural curse on my lips was unexpected, but so was the way this new angle intensified everything. I could barely breathe as Travis turned his head to capture my lips, diving in to consume me and lighting my insides on fire.

It wasn't easy to thrust in and out of him like this, but the angle did have its perks—like guiding my dick to hit against his sweet spot. The one that made him cry out suddenly and grab hold of his cock.

"More," he moaned, arching his back to force my hand.

Need coiled low in my stomach, and so did the sudden urge to look at him, to watch his eyes glaze over as the ecstasy hit, and to know it was all

because of me. I didn’t want this to be like any other no-name encounter he’d fuck and forget.

“Don’t come,” I growled by his ear.

“Fuck you.”

“Maybe later, but I mean it. I wanna see your face when I wring it out of you.”

He snapped his mouth shut as he let go of his rock-hard cock.

I grinned against his neck and pressed a sweaty kiss there. “Good to see you can take orders.”

I didn’t give him a chance to respond as I raced toward my release, as hungry for his as I was for my own.

A few ragged thrusts deep inside to avoid hitting his G-spot was all it took. A searing heat scorched a path down my spine, pulling my balls up tight. I unleashed inside him with a shout I didn’t bother muffling against his skin, wanting him to hear the effect he had on me.

Harsh curses met my ears as I held on to him, waiting for my vision to come back, because holy shit, I think I blacked out for a second.

A threatening cracking sound coming from beneath us had me tensing even as the aftershocks rolled through my body.

“As fucking hot as that was, I’d rather not come in a pile of rubble.”

“Agreed.” He was right, but the last thing I wanted to do was slide out of him. I did it anyway, peeling the condom off my spent cock, tying it off, and then tossing it aside to join the epic mess we’d made. Leftover food, plates, and utensils littered the floor, but neither of us could be bothered with that. Not when Travis climbed off the table, his naked body on full display.

This. This right here was why I wanted to look at him. Because he was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen in my life. Especially with his black hair mussed and wild from my fingers, and the mark I’d left on his shoulder that matched the one on his ass.

The angry reddish-purple shade of his dick was the only part of him that looked the least bit frustrated, its plump head glistening and making my mouth water.

I wanted to lick it.

Travis’s lips curved into a devilish grin when he caught me staring, but I couldn’t help it. Now I understood why no one could.

He reached out for me, helping me down, since my sex-drunk ass wobbled from still-weak knees. “Where do you want me?”

The fact that he was still handing over the reins, letting me take charge instead of being a bossy fuck made me feel even bolder. I glanced past him into the family room, and when my eyes landed on a little piece of our past, I knew exactly where I wanted him.

There was just something else I needed first.

I teased the head of his dick with my finger, running it along his slit and getting it nice and wet. Our eyes locked, and Travis swallowed hard when I brought the digit up to my mouth. I took a long lick, savoring the taste of him on my tongue. It was like nothing else in this world. I didn’t know how to describe it, only that it was like a narcotic, something I could easily become addicted to. Hell, maybe I already was.

As I swallowed down what remained on my finger, Travis’s jaw clenched, like he was physically holding himself back.

The moment I dropped my hand, he attacked.

There was nothing gentle about the way he took possession of me. His hands were everywhere, roaming all over my body, mouth crashing down on mine to steal my breath, both of us groping for any part of the other that we could touch, tongues warring in an assault that left me dizzy and had us stumbling back into the wall.

The cum-drenched head of his dick painted my lower stomach, begging me to give it the attention it desperately needed.

I didn’t want it happening here, though.

Pushing off the wall, I kept my lips fastened to Travis’s, backing him up into the family room, careful not to run into and break anything else.

He ripped his mouth away. “Fucking *touch* me.”

I grabbed two handfuls of his ass and gave them a squeeze.

“Not there.”

“You’re right, not there.” I nodded toward the Persian rug we’d once fooled around on and smoothed my fingers across his ass cheeks to his hips, and then dipped to caress his heavy balls. He leaned into me, and I pressed a kiss against his shoulder. “Care to make a mess out of me on your mom’s rug?”

Travis’s eyes darkened as he followed my gaze, pupils so blown all I could see of the blue was a faint ring around the edges. He was as into this as I was.

Thank fuck.

He swallowed thickly and stilled my wandering hands. I didn't understand why my heart was beating so fast all of a sudden, or why it felt like there was an electric current thrumming between us. But when Travis looked back at me, my chest tightened and warmed, and then he licked his lips and said, "I want you on your back."

It didn't occur to me to give a shit about the fact that he was now issuing commands. Didn't matter. All I cared about was staying connected and watching him fall apart.

All the fuck over me.

I backed away and moved into position, lying flat on the plush rug as Travis sauntered over, massaging his cock with long strokes. It made my own dick stir, even after the insane release that should've tided me over for days.

But I didn't touch myself, didn't move as he dropped to his knees to straddle me, all the while fisting his cock, moving lazily as his eyes drank in the picture I made.

I wondered what was going through his head. If he was thinking back to the past, or making a new memory now to erase the old one.

He was so damn gorgeous in the moonlight, shadows crisscrossing his body, making tattoos across his skin where there were none and lighting up the ones he already had.

I reached up to flatten my hand over the tattoo he got on his chest after graduation, the laurel wreath with the Latin words *Veni Vidi Vici* inside. *I came, I saw, I conquered.*

It was an appropriate phrase right now, considering he was working himself over the top of me in the exact place we'd first kissed. Nothing in my life had been the same since that night. And I had a strong feeling nothing would be after tonight either.

Travis bent his head down to nip at my fingers, and just like that, he snapped out of wherever he'd been lost. That impish tilt to his lips was back, and so was the way he began to jerk his cock, rolling his hips over mine, batting my hands away when I tried to join in on the action.

He was teaching me a lesson. I knew it from the moment his thighs tightened on either side of me, caging me in so I couldn't go anywhere.

So I couldn't run away from him.

If he knew how badly I wanted to be right here in this moment, he wouldn't worry. But he didn't. So I kept my hands by my sides and urged him on with only my words, telling him how fucking sexy he was, how much I wanted him to explode all over me.

Dark hair fell across his forehead, sticking to his damp skin. Corded muscles in his neck and shoulders stretched tight, and with every pump of his dick, his abs contracted.

He was mesmerizing to watch, his skilled fingers reaching down to stroke along his perineum with one hand while the other gripped his impressive hard-on.

"Keep looking at me like that…" he said, his voice coming out like it'd been raked over gravel.

I waited for the threat that never came. "Or what?"

He shook his head as his thighs trembled against me. "Eyes on me."

I couldn't tear them away if I tried. Not when his movements became more jolting and uneven. And especially not when Travis lifted up on his knees and aimed his cock directly at my face.

"Oh fuck yes," I breathed. "Do it."

He kept his eyes on me as his lungs hitched, and then, in an ear-splitting shout, he blew apart spectacularly, his orgasm shooting out of him in jets of warm, sticky cum that coated my face and neck. It kept coming, all the edging we'd been doing since before we got here finally finding its release.

Without thinking, I reached for his thighs, kneading them as Travis drained himself dry all over me. I tongued the liquid coating my lips, humming in deep satisfaction.

Finally spent, he collapsed onto his elbows over me, panting against my mouth as he came down from the high.

"This," he said, tracing my lips and admiring his handiwork, "is how you should always look. Claimed and with a mouthful of my cum."

"Yeah?" I grinned and started to agree when a deep, alarming groan came from our left.

We glanced over just in time to see one of the legs of the dining table give way, falling with a loud crash over several of Vera's plates and leaving them in pieces.

We went completely still as the shock of our wild aftermath set in after being lost in a lust-filled fog. *How in the holy hell…?*

Travis’s brows knitted together as he cocked his head to the side. “What are the chances they notice before leaving town tomorrow?”

I snorted, and when he turned back to look at me, we both burst into fits of laughter that continued well into the night.

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THIRTY-TWO

travis

I DIDN'T KNOW how long I'd been awake, but it'd been long enough to memorize every inch of Caleb's bare back as he lay curled up beside me. His head rested on my shoulder, one arm slung low across my stomach, and I didn't think I'd ever felt so complete in my life. Caleb Reeves was in my arms. I was in his bed. Life was fucking perfect.

Resisting the urge to run my fingers through his hair or across all that delicious skin and risk waking him up, I restarted my count of the light smattering of freckles along his shoulder blades. I made it to fifty when he began to stir, but he only curled up on his side facing away from me, sliding his head off my shoulder and onto the pillow.

Feeling began to creep back into my arm, but I would've rather had him on top of me, cutting off all my circulation, than let him go.

Propping myself up on my elbow, I watched as his breathing evened back out, and then couldn't stop myself from planting a light kiss on the curve of his neck. When he still didn't move, I figured now would be a good time to head to the bathroom before he woke up and all these intimate feelings turned a little hotter.

I slipped out quietly, and when I finished up and stepped out of his en suite, he was still passed out. And so damn gorgeous.

God, you're a sap. Who are *you?*

Someone who wanted to get back in that bed with the man of my dreams, that's who. Someone who never prayed, but was doing it now in the hopes Caleb didn't wake up and think this had all been a mistake.

No, I wasn’t going to even let that thought make its way into my brain. That wasn’t going to happen.

I started back toward the bed when my thigh hit the corner of his desk, hard. I bit back a curse as the table wobbled, several items on top of it clattering to the ground and his camera getting dangerously close. I managed to grab it before it fell, but the incident woke Caleb, and he shot up to a sitting position.

“Shit, sorry,” I said, setting the camera down carefully before picking up what had dropped on the floor. “Go back to bed.”

He rubbed at his eyes and squinted at me. “Are you okay?”

“Yup, all good.” I set notebooks and pens back on the table and then went to close a scrapbook that had fallen open, but stopped short when I saw the photos taped to the pages. “What the…?” I stared at the images for several heartbeats before flipping to the next page. Then the next. And the one after that.

“What’s wrong?” Caleb crawled to the edge of the bed, but when he saw the album I held, he waved me off. “No, just leave that one, it’s fine.”

But it was too late. My interest piqued, I scooped up the book that had fallen open and stared in complete and utter disbelief at what I found inside —me. There was photo after photo, some close up and some from afar, taken at different events, club openings, and a couple of random ones at school functions.

“Can I have that, please?” Caleb said, gesturing to the book.

“Oh, you mean this?” I held the album up and waggled my brows at him. “You can have it back…when you tell me what it is.”

After everything we’d done to each other in the last twenty-four hours, I would’ve thought it impossible for him to be embarrassed about anything with me. But as he stared at the scrapbook in my hand, his cheeks flushed pink.

“No? Want me to guess what *I* think it is?” I strolled toward the bed, well aware of just how naked I was when Caleb’s eyes trailed down to my waking cock. “The ultimate Travis McKinney fan club book. Property of top-paying member Caleb Reeves.”

The flush on his cheeks now spread down his neck. “Give it back.”

“I don’t think so. Not yet.” I flipped to another page, this one displaying an up-close shot of me at a charity event the Elysium held last year. I

remembered arriving with the guys, walking the red carpet, seeing Caleb on the sidelines snapping photos, and at the last second, I'd flipped him off.

This photo was taken right before that moment. I'd been making eyes at the press, playing with them the way I always did in the hopes of getting the best shot I could. I mean, if my face was going to be splashed around, I wanted to make sure I looked fucking *hot*. But none of them had caught me like this.

Caleb had zeroed in from the side, capturing the sharp angles of my jaw, my hooded, smoky eyes, and my slick lips as I licked them. I looked hungry, aroused, and if I didn't remember this exact moment, I would've sworn I was looking at him.

But I wasn't. *He* was looking at me, and this was what he'd seen, captured, and kept…for himself.

"What were you thinking about when you took this?" I stopped by the edge of the bed and turned the book around to show him the photo. "Because I don't think it was how much you hate me."

Caleb looked up at me, a stubborn set to his extremely kissable lips.

"No answer?"

"Give it back."

I looked back to the photo. "You wanna know what I think?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"No." I grinned and handed over the book, but kept it open. "I think you took this so you could look at it every night before you went to bed and imagine kissing me."

"You think so, huh?"

I put a knee to the bed, aware of how it showed off my hard-on as I lowered onto it, directly opposite him. "Hell, maybe you did kiss it. I can imagine that. You lying here in bed, book open to my face, getting yourself off while you kiss my gorgeous image."

"Oh my God." Caleb rolled his eyes. "Could you be more full of yourself?"

"Well, it's hard not to be when I just found your stalker album, and you're sitting there tenting the sheet like we're going to go play under it any moment now." I glanced down to where his dick was upright between his legs. "Want me to bring my stick?"

"Oh, you want to talk stalking, huh? You trying to tell me you didn't do the same to all the photos on my social media?"

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, but you can’t prove it, can you?”

“No? So those likes I got every so often were accidental?”

“What likes?” I’d been careful not to hit *that* button.

“The ones you accidentally hit when you’d scroll through. You know, to obsess over what I was doing.” Caleb gave me a shit-eating grin. “Busted.”

“Okay, pot, seems you were just as interested in what this kettle was doing.” I took back the scrapbook, and when he reached for it, I jerked away.

“Wait, wouldn’t I be the kettle and you’d be the pot?”

“Does it matter? Seems like we were both doing the same thing.”

Caleb took advantage of my distraction, reaching for the album again with such a surprise attack that we both fell back onto the bed. He scrambled to pull it from my arms, and I laughed at how pink his cheeks still were.

“Is there something especially naughty in there you don’t want me to see?”

He licked his lips as he took in my stretched-out body and settled on my dick. “I mean…not yet.”

“Yet? Are you trying to tell me you want to take naked photos of me? ’Cause I gotta say, I’d be into it.”

“You would, huh? Why does that not surprise me?”

“Because you know me.” I arched a brow at his stalker album. “And you apparently watch me enough to know I’ve never met a camera I didn’t like. Especially yours.”

Caleb set the scrapbook on the floor beside the bed and turned back to me, lying on his side to match my pose.

God, I liked looking at him. He hadn’t even bothered pulling a sheet over himself, giving me a full, unabashed view of him. I wondered how many freckles I’d find on this side of his body and decided I’d make it my mission to find out.

“I told you,” he said, meeting my eyes. “I never forgot.”

“But you *hated* me.”

“You hated me first.”

“Only to protect myself.”

He nodded slowly. “I know that now.”

Unable to stay away from him for even another second, I inched closer and slid my leg between his thighs. It brought our cocks up against each other, and he licked his lips as he speared a hand through my hair. Then he brought me in for a kiss that was both soft and hungry. Any worry I had about him waking up regretting this vanished.

“I’m sorry I hurt you back then,” he whispered against my lips.

“It’s all good.” I chuckled. “I survived.”

“No. Don’t do that.” Caleb pulled back, cradling my face as he locked eyes with me. “Hear me when I say I’m sorry. I never meant to make you feel lesser or rejected. I was confused because you made me feel more than I ever had that night. You opened my eyes, made me really look at you, and Travis?”

“Yeah?”

“I haven’t stopped looking since.” He gestured to the scrapbook lying on the bed behind me. “Photos were the only way I could get close to you.” His lips quirked. “Thank God for a zoom lens.”

“I had no idea.”

“Why would you?”

Good point. I’d been so caught up in keeping him at a distance that I hadn’t bothered to wonder why he’d acted the way he had, *or* why he’d put up with my bullshit all these years later.

“Well…” I pushed him to his back and climbed over him, straddling his waist. “You don’t need your zoom lens now. You’re about as close to me as you can get.”

“That an offer?”

“To take photos of me naked? No, it’s a request. I’m hot, in the prime of my life, and it should be documented. You know, for posterity.”

Caleb chuckled and reached for my hips.

“You know you want to.”

“These photos,” Caleb said, trailing his hands down to wrap around my cock. “Are they just for me?”

I sucked in a breath at his touch. “They can be. But I’d understand if you want to publish.” My head fell back as I jacked my hips forward. “Who wouldn’t want to share all this hotness with the world?”

“If you do say so yourself.”

I turned my head, eyeing Caleb’s camera where it sat on his desk, and tightened my legs around his waist. The idea of him taking my photo was

hotter than I ever could've imagined, and now that I knew he'd get off on it too, it was going to happen.

"I tell you what, you take some photos, I'll pose, and afterward we'll go through them together. *Then* you can decide what to do with them."

"And what if I just want to lie in my bed at night and kiss them?"

I grinned at the smartass under me and leaned down to nip at his lower lip. "Then you better let me watch."

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THIRTY-THREE

caleb

I CURLED MY leg around Travis's and flipped him onto his back, taking him by surprise.

"Stay." I pressed a kiss to his lips. "Right." One to his chin. "There." A final kiss to his chest, and then I climbed off the bed and headed into my closet to throw on a pair of sweatpants.

"No, Caleb, I just dragged you *out* of the closet," Travis joked. When I stepped back out, he added, "Did I say you could put your clothes back on?"

"Didn't *I* say to stay right where I left you? On your back, McKinney."

He lay back down. "You're a bossy fucker today. I like it."

I picked up my camera, took off the lens cap, and changed the mode dial. "Good. 'Cause I plan to order that sweet ass around."

"Oh? Is that where you wanna start?" Travis started to turn over, giving me a glimpse of the bruise I'd left on his smooth, firm cheeks. The same ones I'd spread apart for my dick.

I'd always enjoyed sex. But sex with Travis was on an entirely different level, one I didn't know I could, or even wanted to, come back from.

What I did know? That I wanted these shots of him naked in my bed to remember the moment even if it'd always be seared into my brain anyway. He was too beautiful not to capture, and now I didn't have to hide the way I liked to look at him, since he'd already busted me for it.

Travis moved onto all fours and playfully shook his ass at me. "I don't see you snapping away."

“That’s because you’re not the one in charge.” I grabbed his ankle and tugged, and he fell flat onto his stomach. “And I told you how I wanted you.”

“You did, didn’t you?” He rolled over and spread himself out across my mattress, giving me the view I’d asked for. I sucked in a deeper breath as I brought my camera up to focus on him.

“Perfect,” I said, moving in closer and putting a knee on the bed. “Put your hands under your head.”

“Like this?” He brought them up and slipped them under the pillow, and holy hell, it took everything I had to keep the camera in my hands and not reach for him.

“Exactly like that.” I brought the camera up and put my eye to the viewfinder, focusing on his exquisite face. “Turn your head to the left—yeah, that’s it—and tilt it up a little.” The lighting highlighted all the sharp angles of it in a way that made my pulse race.

“Has anyone ever told you how seriously fuckin’ hot you get when you’re all Mr. Photographer?”

“No.” I smirked behind my hand as I held the camera steady. “But could you maybe wait to tell me that until after I’ve taken the shot, thanks.”

“See? You’re all ordering me around…”

“You’re still talking.”

“And you’re still hot.”

I let out a sigh and lowered the camera. “Travis?”

He turned his head on the pillow to look at me, a grin curving his too-talkative lips.

“Stop. Talking.”

He waggled his brows. “Wanna come stop me?”

“No. I *want* to take your photo.”

“But you’re too far away. Come closer.”

“Because that will help you behave? I don’t think so.” I brought my camera back up and couldn’t help snapping a shot of his pouting face. “Now turn your head and zip it.”

“Sheesh, don’t get your boxers all twisted. Oh wait, you aren’t wearing—”

“*Travis*.”

“Okay, okay.” He bit down into his lip to keep from saying anything else, and it seemed my chastising him actually paid off, because the picture

he made then was downright sexy.

I shifted up to my knees, moving to a slightly higher elevation so I could capture the light on his chest. The contrast of his strong body and soft lips, his smooth skin and morning stubble, it all added different textures and interesting points of focus that made you want to reach out and touch him.

Was it any wonder he attracted attention wherever he went?

Wanting more of him, I moved to my feet, and Travis glanced up at me. I snapped the shot, catching him off guard, and as I moved further up the bed, planting my feet on either side of him, Travis really got into it. A hand under the pillow, the other sliding down his chest, those bedroom eyes glancing up at me full of devilry.

Snap. Snap. Snap.

Each shot better than the last. Sexier. Hotter. More intimate.

My cock strained against the soft fabric of my sweats, and when he winked at me, I had to reach down and give myself a squeeze.

"Did I have that effect on you on all those red carpets?" he asked.

"I'll never tell."

"That's a yes."

I grinned and snapped his cocky expression. "You look like you're feeling pretty good about yourself."

"Can you blame me? I've got Caleb Reeves taking photos of me to add to his stalker album."

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?"

"Nope. I want it displayed on the coffee table. Give all our guests something hot to look at."

All I could do was shake my head, because there was no one else like Travis—all that bold, in-your-face confidence that bordered on outrageous most days, and the way he gave no fucks… Except when it came to me, apparently. He made it sound like I was his one weakness.

I hopped off the bed and pulled the chair over to stand on and get some full-body snaps.

"Cover your hips with the sheet," I said, and Travis balked.

"What? Fuck no. My cock is a work of art. It deserves to be admired."

He wasn't wrong about that. It *was* the most impressive cock I'd ever seen. "My bad for trying to preserve your modesty. I forgot you don't have any."

“Not a bit.” He smiled proudly as I directed him into a few different positions.

It wasn’t exactly a hardship to get the shots he wanted, because hell, I wanted them too. They probably wouldn’t make it into the scrapbook, but maybe into something under lock and key. He might have no limits, but there were a few I wanted for my eyes only.

“All right, let’s change things up a bit. Lie down on your stomach on the edge of the bed,” I said, stepping down from the chair. As Travis moved, I played with the curtain, trying to get the right light for what I wanted.

“Is it my ass or my face you’re trying to light up?”

“If I focus on your ass, I’m gonna have to edit out the bruise I left there.” When Travis’s eyes lit up, I added, “Whoops.”

“Shiiit, now you have to. That’s so hot.” He looked over his shoulder. “Did you really leave a bruise?”

“Guess my mouth got a little too eager.” An understatement. I was already impatient to get it back on him again after getting teased through this lens.

Getting down on one knee, I brushed Travis’s hair back so it spiked up a bit. He watched me with that intense stare, the one you could feel even when you weren’t looking at him. And I’d had a lot of experience trying not to look at him. Those stares could bore holes deep into your body if he willed them to, or they could light you up from the inside out. It was nice to be on the latter side right now.

“Rest your chin on your arm and just look at me.” As I went to move my hand from his hair, he reached for my wrist and pressed a kiss to the tips of my fingers. The tremor that went through me at the simple, unexpected move made him smile. He let go, and I shifted back to view him again from behind the camera.

The vision he made was one I knew I’d never forget, even without a picture as proof. The white sheets were the perfect contrast to his tanned skin and black hair, and the rumpled mess around him made you wonder what he’d been up to moments before this shot. Until, of course, you looked at his face.

His hooded eyes, sensual mouth, and blissed-out expression told of a beautiful man who’d spent the morning rolling between the sheets with someone he desired—and that person was on the other side of the camera.

It was in his relaxed pose, the soft glimmer in his eyes as he stared up at me, the level of comfort he showed by relaxing into the moment. He was looking at me in a way that had my pulse racing.

He was looking at me like this was the first time he'd ever seen me.

I took the first shot, then another, and another, before lowering my camera.

"You okay?" I wasn't sure it was the right thing to ask, since we'd been having such a good time, but something in the air felt like it had shifted, and I wanted to make sure I wasn't missing anything.

"Yeah, why?"

"I don't know, you just seemed… It felt like something changed. That's all." *Or* maybe I'd let *myself* get a little too caught up in what I was doing and was making up stories around what I thought I was seeing.

Hell, maybe Travis looked at everyone like that.

He sat up then, pulling the sheet over his lap as he swung his legs over the side of the bed.

"I mean, you're not wrong." He smirked and gave a nonchalant shrug. "Something pretty big has changed between us. I'm sitting here naked in front of you with bruises all over my body, thanks to you. Maybe that's it."

Maybe. But it felt like more than that, and his quick deflection told me that maybe he was feeling it too. Travis wasn't exactly known for his heart-to-heart conversations, but in those few minutes I'd been taking those final photos, I felt like he'd said more in a look than he'd ever said aloud.

"You're probably right."

"Or maybe you started thinking about what the others are going to say—you know, subconsciously," he said.

"Are you thinking about that?"

"I don't really give a shit what they think. It's none of their business. Never has been. But I know you worry about shit like that, so if you'd rather this stay here, you know, between us, I'm cool with that."

My mind jumbled with everything running through it. One second I'd thought Travis was feeling something more for me than he ever had, and the next he was offering to keep me a secret?

Not wanting to read into it wrong and ruin what was one of the best weekends of my life, I reached for the sheet over his lap and wound it around my wrist, yanking it free.

“That’s fine with me. As long as it’s not an excuse for you to go and show this ‘work of art’”—I glanced at his impressive cock—“to anyone who will look.”

Travis got to his feet and walked over to where I sat, and I parted my legs, making room for him.

“As long as *you* want to look at it,” he said, spearing his hand in my hair and tilting my face up to his. “Then I’m not going to show it to another fucking soul. Count on it.”

There it was again. That same expression he’d had earlier, the one that made my pulse race.

“Travis…”

He put a finger to my lips then leaned down and replaced it with his mouth. “I don’t want anyone but you, and now that I have you, I’m not gonna fuck it up.”

My lips twitched under his. “So romantic.”

Travis nipped at the corner of my mouth. “Oh, you wanted romance?”

“No.” I snorted, and when he straightened to his full height, an idea popped into my head. I quickly got to my feet, not wanting the vision to vanish. “But there is one thing I *do* want.”

“What’s that?”

With my camera in one hand, I took his in my other and started toward the bathroom. “Grab some jeans.”

“Jeans? What the—”

I stopped and pulled him in until his cock rubbed up against my soft sweats. “Do you trust me?”

“Um…not really?”

I chuckled and reached down to swat him on the ass. “That’s probably smart. But grab the jeans anyway. There’s one last photo I want to take.”

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THIRTY-FOUR

travis

HEAVEN HAD NOTHING on what was happening inside condo #4207. The weekend had been better than any dream or fantasy I'd ever had, and considering I had the imagination of a sexual deviant, that was saying something.

Every muscle in my body was deliciously sore, but considering my ass was feeling it the most, sitting was out of the question at the moment. Instead, I stood at the kitchen island, refueling with several bags of chips, alternating between barbecue, Cool Ranch Doritos, and salt and vinegar. Only the healthiest of options, obviously, but I needed the carbs.

"Holy shit, I'm gonna need a caffeine drip," Caleb said as he emerged from his room in a pair of sweatpants. He caged me in from behind, pressed a kiss to my shoulder, and then dropped his chin there to rest. "You're trying to kill me."

"Trust me, I want your body too much to kill you." Even now my cock hummed with a readiness should Caleb want another round. It was ridiculous. I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to get enough. "Did you get the table ordered?"

"Yep. It'll be delivered this week, and I emailed their house manager to give them a heads-up and tell them to keep quiet."

I smirked, remembering the way we'd had to rig the leg so it wasn't immediately obvious we'd broken the damn thing. The setup had looked decent enough, as long as no one used it.

Thank God our parents had decided on an early flight and hadn't seemed to notice.

“You know,” I said, reaching inside one of the chip bags, “it’s lucky for you that you live in the Towers now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means”—I turned around to face him and tapped him on the lips with a Dorito—“since we both need to rejuvenate, we’re spending today at the spa.”

His teeth closed down on the chip. “The spa? Yeah, right.”

“It’s the best cure for a hangover.” I lifted my finger, still coated with a mix of seasonings, to trace those full, sexy lips that were still swollen from mine. “Especially a *sex* hangover.”

Caleb’s eyes darkened and he grabbed my wrist, holding it still as he sucked my finger inside his mouth. My dick jerked beneath the pair of sweats I’d stolen from Caleb, sending my insides into a frenzy of need.

He swirled his tongue around my finger before letting it go with a pop. “You were saying?”

I blanked. “Sex?”

He chuckled again and grazed his mouth over mine. “Something about a bougie spa. I would’ve thought you’d hate the idea of someone else putting their hands on me.”

I growled. “Yeah, that’s not happening. You want a massage, I’ll oil you up myself.”

“Then why are we going anywhere?” His seductive tone turned my insides into a puddle of goddamn goo.

“That’s a good question.” I leaned in to nip at his lower lip, but Caleb smacked my ass and stepped back out of my reach.

“No, you’re probably right. We need some actual food if we’re gonna make it.”

“Ugh. I hate when I’m right.”

He snickered and reached past me to grab a handful of chips. “So what’s our story gonna be?”

“For what?”

“In case we run into the guys?”

“We won’t. It’s Sunday.”

“What, they don’t go to the spa on Sundays?”

“Nah.”

“Then what about tomorrow? You don’t think they’ll have questions?”

Oh, I had no doubt they planned on badgering the shit out of me. I'd already seen the missed calls and messages blowing up my phone, but I'd been too busy to care. The fact that none of them had banged on our door demanding to know what was going on was surprising, but welcome. I wouldn't have answered for their asses anyway, not when mine had been so exquisitely occupied.

Caleb must've read my thoughts, because he licked his thumb and said, "Exactly."

"So they'll ask. We don't have to tell them shit. I already told you that."

"No? Have you seen your neck?"

I smirked. "Have you seen your back?"

He shook his head. "Why do I feel like this is asking for trouble?"

"Caleb, gorgeous, don't you know?" I wrapped an arm around his waist and hauled him up against me. "I am the trouble."

THE MOMENT WE stepped inside the Towers spa, I knew we were fucked. Several of the guys were in and around the pool and hot tub, Donovan was over by the juice bar, and West was lounged back getting a vitamin cocktail through an IV.

And every single one of them looked our way when we walked through the doors.

"Shit," Caleb said under his breath, going still as the door swung shut behind us.

In a matter of seconds, we were swarmed. Somehow West was the first up, dragging his IV pole behind him. If he hadn't been wearing one of the spa's luxe white robes, you would've thought he'd escaped from the hospital.

"About fucking time you made an appearance," he said, and then looked us up and down. "How was family dinner?"

"It was fine, why?" I said.

"Because you two look guilty as sin."

"Yeah, they do," Donovan agreed, brows raised.

I shrugged, trying to seem as unaffected as possible—after all, that was the plan we'd decided on. Plus, I doubted Caleb was dying to let the world know we'd spent all weekend fucking. He was still busy trying to wrap his own head around it, so the last thing he needed was to deal with these morons.

“A couple of massive hangovers had us both lying low, not to mention drinks last night. That’s why we’re here.” I nodded toward West’s IV. “Electrolytes.”

“Travis McKinney, I can spot a hickey a mile away.” East strolled up, dripping wet from the pool.

No, he fucking couldn’t, because I’d made sure to cover those marks before heading down here so the staff wouldn’t gossip, but nice try.

I pretended to wince and then rubbed my temples. “Think you can keep it down? My head’s killing me.”

He snorted and dropped his gaze to my hips. “Yeah, I’ll bet it is. You two manage to break any world records yet?”

“Oh shit, are those scratches?” West said, but he wasn’t looking at me. He was looking at Caleb.

“Probably,” Caleb replied. “I heard I ran into a few doors on Friday.”

“Doors?” East made a noise in the back of his throat. “Riiight. You weren’t walking so straight that night.”

West sputtered out a laugh, shoving his roommate in the arm. “Yeah, you still walking the straight and narrow these days, Caleb, or have you gone off the beaten path?”

I groaned. “Way to be lame-asses. What else ya got?”

“Uh, you do know we have eyes, right?” Gavin gestured toward Caleb. “He practically ripped that guy’s arm off for dancing with you.”

“So?”

“So my boyfriend had to step in to make sure no one got hurt.”

“That’s not why,” Daire interjected, causing Gavin to elbow him in the ribs.

Donovan swirled his smoothie with a straw. “Hold on a minute. Aren’t you always the one giving the rest of us shit for not fessing up to all the sexual details since we’ve gotten boyfriends? Hypocrite much?”

“You’re missing a key point in that argument,” I said. “I don’t have a boyfriend. And there’s nothing to tell.”

But even as I said the words, I hated the denial of Caleb and the way it felt on my tongue, but he needed time to process. Something I was going to give him. Obviously, if it was my choice, I wouldn’t have minded if the whole fucking world knew what we’d been up to over the weekend.

“So what is this, then?” Donovan asked. “Are you two a couple now, just without the title?”

Daire snorted. “They have a title, it’s called *brothers*.”

“We’re *step*brothers, idiot,” Caleb corrected him.

“Oh.” Donovan grinned. “So is there something there after all?”

“No,” I said.

East lifted his chin and sniffed. “Better not be. Traitor.”

“You guys are taking this too far,” I said. “It was a drunken night out that Caleb had to sleep off, that’s all.”

“Okay, so not a couple.” West looked between the two of us, refusing to drop the subject. “Dating? Just fucking?”

“Or just a whole bunch of brotherly love?” East added, back to teasing now that the danger of being the lone bachelor in the group had passed.

I rolled my eyes. “Knock it off. You poured tequila down his throat all night and expected him not to black out and go wild? Come on. We’ve all been there.”

“Yeah, but when Caleb goes there, he usually loses his clothes.” East eyed him. “You saying that didn’t happen?”

“The last thing *I* remember happening was being forced to drink shots.” Caleb crossed his arms. “Thanks for that, by the way.”

“You’re welcome.” East’s eyes shifted back to mine, a devious gleam in them. “So you had no trouble getting him to bed, then?”

My dick immediately reacted to his words, and I was positive the fucker knew it with the way his gaze dropped to my hips. But East didn’t push further than that—he was merely testing the waters, looking for information he could no doubt use against me later.

“Nope. I just kind of shoved him into his room and made sure he wouldn’t suffocate when he landed face-first in his pillows.”

“That was…nice of you.”

“We called a truce.” Caleb side-eyed me.

“A truce?” East sounded skeptical as he looked between us. “Isn’t that sweet.”

Yeah, he was totally onto us, and the longer we talked, the deeper this hole we were digging for ourselves would go.

“You know what’s not sweet? You guys blocking the path to the IVs. So how about you get the fuck out of the way?”

“Someone’s testy…” West waggled his brows, but wheeled his pole aside and gestured toward the lounges in the back. “But please, come with me and we’ll get you hooked up.”

I didn’t dare look Caleb’s way in case I did something stupid, like reach for his hand and lead him to the lounges. Instead, I started after West and told myself the second we were hydrated and alone again, I’d give Caleb that massage I’d promised.

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THIRTY-FIVE

travis

“IF THIS IS a party, I’m turning around and walking back out,” Caleb said, reaching up to mess with the blindfold I’d forced him to wear on the drive.

I grabbed his hand before he could take it off and brought it up to my lips. “It’s not a party.” I kissed the tips of his fingers and then sucked one into my mouth.

“Travis.” He groaned, but didn’t pull his hand away.

“Hmm?”

“How close are we?”

As I pulled my mouth off his finger, I took a quick glance out the window of the limo. Scotty was busy driving the rest of the guys around today, so I’d hired a private car for the two of us. “Actually, we’re almost there. But that doesn’t mean—”

My words were cut off as he reached for the blindfold again, and I quickly straddled him and yanked it back down.

“You’re being especially naughty today, birthday boy,” I said by his ear as I held his wrists down by his sides. “Don’t make me change up the itinerary.”

He turned his head so our lips grazed. “What if I want you to?”

Those teasing words and the way my cock reacted to them had me seriously considering it. Today wasn’t exactly *my* idea of a good time, but it was something Caleb would enjoy, and as long as I got to spend his birthday with him, I didn’t give a damn what we did.

The limo stopped in front of our drop-off, and I let out an exaggerated sigh.

“Guess you’ll have to wait to take advantage of my body.”

Caleb’s growl made me grin as I climbed off him and adjusted my pants. The fact that he hadn’t run away screaming and calling this a mistake after last weekend had given me a little hope that he wouldn’t change his mind. That maybe, even though we were keeping it platonic in front of everyone, he’d want more. With me.

It was wishful, stupid thinking, but I didn’t care. I was determined to spend every free minute he gave me making up for lost time and showing him how good things could be if he chose me.

The door opened, and I climbed out first before reaching back for Caleb.

“Keep it on,” I said as he took my arm and stepped out. He looked more than a little wary, and I chuckled and leaned in by his ear. “Still not a party. Scout’s honor.”

He snorted. “You? A boy scout?”

“I know, it sounds terrible to me too.” I went to reach for his hand but stopped myself.

We didn’t do that in public. Nothing that would tip anyone off as to what was happening behind closed doors.

But…I needed to help lead him inside. I wanted to put my hands all over him, but Caleb’s potential reaction stopped me.

I grabbed his forearm instead and headed toward the entrance.

“Watch your step,” I said, pulling open the wide door and leading him inside. The second we stepped into the vast room, the distinct smell of pine, citrus, and malt hit my nose—*blech*—and Caleb froze.

“Why does it smell like we just walked into a pub? You said this wasn’t a party.”

“And it isn’t.”

“Then why does it smell like a frat house?”

“Been to a lot of those, have you?”

“Enough. Seriously, Travis, I don’t want a—”

“Calm down,” I said, and reached over for his blindfold, slowly tugging it down his face. “This isn’t a party and we’re *not* at a pub—or frat house, for that matter.”

Caleb blinked, and as he began to focus on the wide-open space of one of New York’s oldest breweries, his lips began to curve. The old wooden floorboards of the restored warehouse had definitely seen better days, but

added to the overall vibe of the place. If a sticky floor, beer on tap, and fermenting barley and hops in those big-ass vats in the middle of the room could be called a vibe.

“You brought me to a brewery?”

He sounded about as shocked as I was that I’d actually done it, considering that likely meant I had to drink this shit for the next however many hours we were there.

“I didn’t just *bring* you to a brewery, I rented the place out for however long you want to stay.”

Caleb took in the empty space, and when he turned back to me, his lips twitched. “Which I’m guessing you hope is five minutes?”

I slipped my hands into my pockets to keep from reaching out and tasting that teasing grin, because damn he was tempting.

“I mean, I’m willing to give you ten. After all, it *is* your birthday.”

“Yeah, it is, and that means I get whatever the hell I want.” Caleb took a step closer and shocked the hell out of me by leaning in to whisper against my lips, “And you’re looking really good right now.”

My dick punched against the zipper of my pants as my breath caught in my throat. “All because I brought you to a brewery? Damn, wish I’d known that sooner.”

“No, because you brought me somewhere I know you’d never set foot in for anyone other than me. That’s super fucking hot.”

I was just about to tell him so was he when someone cleared their throat from behind the front counter. We turned to see a woman in black pants and a shirt smiling at us.

“Welcome to Seven Barrel Brewery. Travis and Caleb, is that right?”

“That’s right,” I said, moving over to her. Caleb followed, looking around at the massive pipes that lined the beams of the old warehouse turned brewery/restaurant.

“I understand it’s your birthday?”

“This guy right here.” I gestured to Caleb, who flashed his easygoing smile.

“This place is incredible.”

“Thanks. It’s been in my family a long time now, and we take a lot of pride when it comes to our brews. Are you into craft beers?”

It took everything I had not to gag at the suggestion, but luckily, Caleb replied.

“Love them. I’m always game to try something new.”

“Very good. That’s what today is all about. I thought we’d start by giving you a tour and explaining how we make our beer, and then we can get to some tasting and food. Does that sound good?”

The food part sounded amazing, the rest apparently sounded *great* to Caleb, and that was all that really mattered. I wasn’t here for me. This wasn’t *for* me.

Gesture-wise, though, it was kind of for me, because I’d swung and hit the ball right out of the park. Judging by the way Caleb kept sneaking glances my way, I was going to benefit from this all night long.

“Okay, well, if you follow me, I’ll take you out to where all the magic happens.”

Caleb followed our host through a set of double doors, and when he looked over his shoulder to grin my way, I plastered a smile on my face so as not to dampen his experience.

For the next half-hour I learned more about beer than I ever needed or wanted. From the malting and mashing to the fact that beer didn’t only smell bad when you drank it from the bottle, it smelled even worse from the byproducts the fermentation produces.

Seriously, wasn’t a tour like this supposed to make me want to *drink* the beer? This just made me dig my heels in on my opinion that beer was one of the nastiest alcoholic beverages to ever be consumed. Piss water. That was my belief and I was sticking to it.

“Right, well, would you two like to try some of our house brews?”

Pass. Hard pass.

“We’d love to.” Caleb’s devilish grin told me he could see right through my strained smile. But when our jovial host headed toward the bar and we made our way back out to the restaurant area, he leaned in close and said, “This is killing you, isn’t it?”

“The tour was…interesting.”

“Mhmm.” Caleb slid into one side of a booth as I took the other.

“It was. I learned that I was right—beer really is gross.” I reached into the inside pocket of my blazer and pulled out a flask. When I took a long swig, Caleb scoffed.

“You brought a chaser?”

“Hey, I didn’t pull it out during the tour.”

“Which is shocking. But I’m impressed.”

“Yeah?” I slid my leg in between his. “How impressed?”

He winked, and it was such a casual, sexy move that I still couldn’t believe it was directed at me. “Guess you’ll find out later.”

God, why couldn’t it already *be* later?

As our host came back with a tray of house samples, I tucked my flask back into my jacket and prepared myself for the next round.

Lucky for me, she also brought out some food for us to taste.

After going over the different brews and handing us each a brochure with a pen to make notes, she left us to it, and Caleb raised his small glass to mine.

“Thank you,” he said when our eyes locked. “For being so thoughtful.”

“And?”

“And for your sacrifice,” he teased.

“I was thinking more like ‘thank you for blowing my mind and my—’”

Caleb reached over the table and clamped his hand over my mouth.

I raised a brow, and his lips quirked.

“Thanks for that too.”

As he dropped his hand and leaned back, I brushed my knee against the inside of his thigh. “Anytime. And I do mean *any*time.”

“I’ll consider taking you up on that.”

“*Consider*?” I rubbed my chest. “Ugh, that hurts.”

He took a sip of his beer. “Mmm, that’s good. You might even like that one.”

“Doubtful.” I flipped the brochure to check the name of this one, since those at least kept things amusing. “*Down Boy*?”

“No way. That’s what it’s called?” Caleb glanced down at the description and chuckled. “Think our host is trying to send a message?”

“I mean, that’s not gonna be possible around you.” I set the glass aside and picked up another. “What’s this one?”

Caleb took one look and choked on his beer. He grabbed a napkin off the dispenser and wiped at his mouth as I looked at what caused that reaction.

“Holy shit. *Bumfuckery*? Now that’s a sign if I ever saw one.” I swallowed down a big gulp and managed not to cringe. How could I with a name like that?

“If I remember right, you gave me a lot of shit for drinking beers with ‘pretty labels.’ Having a change of heart?”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” I pushed the tasting glass his way. “Go on. Try some *Bumfuckery*, Caleb. Tell me how much you love it.”

He shook his head as he brought the beer to his lips and swallowed. And swallowed some more. He drained the rest of the brew and, when he set the glass back down, ran his tongue over his lips in a way that was fucking indecent for our location.

“Can’t get enough?” I said. “Need more *Bumfuckery* in your life, Caleb?”

His eyes crinkled at the sides when he smiled and rubbed his leg against mine under the table. “You know what? Maybe I do.”

His words jolted my chest like an electric paddle, but I tried not to let it show on my face. I didn’t need to get my hopes up any more than they already were.

We’re just hanging out. Getting to know each other again without throwing barbs constantly.

If this was just sex… I could live with that. Exclusive sex. Sex where no one else touched him or knew what he sounded like when he moaned.

That would be enough. Right?

I trapped his wandering leg with both of mine and gave it a squeeze. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“You should. It’s my birthday. Anything I say goes.” Caleb scooped up a loaded potato skin, dipped it in ranch, and took a bite.

“Anything?”

“That’s right.” Caleb looked at the remaining food in front of us but didn’t say a word.

“You’re not going to elaborate, are you?”

His eyes twinkled with a teasing light that stroked my dick as good as I knew his hand would.

I waited for him to continue. Then waited. And waited some more.

“Caleb…”

“You done?”

I looked down at the full plate in front of me and several remaining samples, then back to him. “Yes?”

“Good.” He slid out of the booth and gestured to the door. “’Cause I’m suddenly in the mood for some more *Bumfuckery.*..at home.”

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THIRTY-SIX

caleb

“DAMN, SOMEONE’S COOKING something amazing,” I said as we headed down the hallway to our condo.

“Yeah, they are. As a matter of fact…” Travis opened our door, and the scent came wafting out. He gestured for me to go in first, and I gave him a curious look before stepping inside.

“Holy shit.” I didn’t get far—the setup in front of me stopped me in my tracks.

The lights were low, curtains pulled fully open to let in the city view, while music played faintly in the background. Balloons in every shade of blue—my favorite color—were strung together to make an arch over the window, with a few others left loose to dangle near the ceiling. A smaller, more intimate table than the one in our dining room had been brought in, complete with crisp white linen, tapered candles, and roses. In the kitchen, a chef was busy at the stove, cooking something I couldn’t see but that immediately had my stomach growling.

“Travis…” As the door clicked shut, he came to stand beside me, and I stared at him with wide eyes. “What have you done?”

He lifted a shoulder and shoved his hands in his pockets. “You said you didn’t want a party.”

I was unable to form words due to the shock flooding through my veins. Spending the day at the brewery was already outside of Travis’s comfort zone, but this? This was romance. And he didn’t do romance.

“Is this…okay?” For the first time maybe ever, he sounded a bit unsure.

I looked back at the incredible scene before us and ran a hand over my hair. This was the last thing I'd expected, and it made something in my chest tighten. "It's incredible."

"Yeah?"

I turned back to him and reached for his face, then brushed a kiss across his pouty mouth as he pulled me in flush against him. My mind raced, matching the rapid pace of my heart as I sank into the warm heat of his mouth, our tongues leisurely tangling and tasting.

"Best birthday ever," I said, just before the chef cleared her throat.

"Dinner will be ready in five. Can I get you both drinks?"

"We can get—" I started.

"That would be great, thank you."

As she headed off to grab them, Travis caught the look I was giving him and shook his head.

"It's already taken care of. Just enjoy it. You know how to do that, right?"

"How not to lift a finger? Nope, I suppose you'll have to show me."

"Smartass." He pulled out my chair and motioned for me to sit.

"You did not just pull out my chair."

"I did. I'm chivalrous like that."

"Really? Since when?"

"Since now, so sit your ass down and enjoy your birthday dinner, you sexy fucker."

A laugh sputtered out of me, but I sat down and let him push it in. Not long ago, I would've expected the chair to break on me, like some kind of evil prank to watch me fall on my ass, and now all this?

I glanced around the room again, soaking in the time and effort this must've taken to put together, then looked across the table, where Travis had taken his seat.

"Okay, spill. Where's the real Travis? What have you done with him?"

Travis's lips tugged up at one corner. "I stripped and tied him to your bed. He wasn't upset about it at all."

I grinned at his ridiculousness, but still looked past his shoulder to the hall that led to my room. "That a request for later?"

Travis's blue eyes darkened as they lowered to my mouth. "If that's what you want. Tonight's about you, remember, not me."

I chuckled and leaned back in my chair, stroking the white tablecloth. “Now I *know* you’re an imposter. Last time I checked, everything was about you.”

“Well, maybe I’ve changed.”

Our chef stopped by the table then with a glass of beer for me and a wine for Travis, and after thanking her, I eyed his glass.

“So sophisticated.”

“I told you, I’ve changed.” He held up his glass to clink against mine, and while I knew he was joking about “changing,” something about the statement made my stomach twist.

I didn’t want Travis to change. Not for me. The whole reason I was drawn to him was because of who he was—the outrageous flirt who did and said whatever was on his mind—but it seemed he was working a different angle today. One I didn’t even think he realized he was doing. That of the attentive boyfriend.

A role he’d no doubt run screaming from if I even dared to mention it, because Travis didn’t *do* boyfriends. Didn’t do commitment. So to see him like this, putting in such an effort for me, had completely thrown me for a loop.

“You’re being quiet.”

I looked back across the table to see him studying me over the top of his glass, and I took a quick sip of my beer to gather my thoughts.

“I’m just wondering when you had the time to put all of this together. We’ve practically been joined at the—”

“Dick?”

And *there* was the Travis I knew. “Yeah, something like that.”

“Well, you know, I occasionally let you go to shower and eat…food. I was stealthy.”

“Yes, you were.” I nodded and looked over my shoulder to where the chef was plating our food. “Oh shit, is that lobster?”

“Surf and turf,” Travis said, grinning. “If I remember right, that’s—”

“My *favorite*. You get the best of both worlds.”

“Exactly. And who wouldn’t want that?”

“Wow.” I couldn’t remember the last time anyone had gone to such trouble to make me feel special, and my heart did all kinds of trippy things in my chest. I hooked my foot around his ankle, needing to connect us in some way. “You really thought of everything.”

Travis shrugged. “I know you.”

That much was clear. In fact, I was starting to think he knew me better than I knew myself. But that had always been the way with Travis. He was intuitive like that, drawing me out of my shell when I’d usually hide away. Showing me what life was like through his lens instead of mine. All bold colors, outlandish acts, and extravagant gestures…apparently.

The candlelight flickered between us, casting shadows on his gorgeous face. When he brought his glass to his lips, I couldn’t help but lick mine.

Travis shifted on his seat, clearing his throat. “If you don’t stop looking at me like that, your surf and turf is going to get cold and tossed.”

“Can’t have that.”

“Nope. So stare at a wall or something, would you? I’m trying to fucking behave myself over here.”

“Who asked you to do that?”

“Caleb…”

“Hmm?” I ran my foot up the inside of his leg.

“Do you remember what happened the last time you played footsie with me under a table?”

Hell yes I did. It was seared into my memory. “I do. And this one’s not nearly as sturdy.”

Travis brought his feet together under the table, trapping my foot as he leaned toward me. “Then unless you want an audience while I suck your dick, you’re gonna want to stop teasing me.”

My cock jerked at the idea, but even I had my limits. As I was sure the poor chef did.

I let out a sigh and drew my foot back to my side of the table. “Damn, you really *are* behaving tonight.”

“I told you.” Travis winked at me, and the flirtatious gesture did nothing to ease the ache between my thighs. “I’ve changed. So stop being a bad influence.”

A burst of laughter left me just as the chef stopped by our table with two plates in hand. She slid them in front of us with a smile, and as she turned to walk off, I leaned over to whisper, “I’m being a bad influence?”

Travis picked up his napkin and put it in his lap. “You’re the one who wants me to strip you naked so you can show off your birthday suit to the chef.”

My mouth fell open as Travis looked to the kitchen and pursed his lips.

“On second thought, you think she’d be into it? The more we talk about it, the more I’m liking the idea…”

I shook my head and gestured with my knife to the lobster tail sitting over his filet mignon. “Put some of that in your mouth before you ruin your sparkling record of good behavior tonight.”

Travis cut a piece off and brought it to his lips. “Fine. But just so you know, my good behavior ends after this meal. Dessert is fair game.”

“Bringing me something to blow?”

“Caleb…” He growled.

“What? I meant candles.” When I smirked, he narrowed those gorgeous ice-blue eyes, and I popped a bite of lobster in my mouth. It was so damn good it practically melted on my tongue. I couldn’t help my low moan, and from the sound coming across the table, neither could Travis.

He swallowed his bite and pointed at his plate. “Remind me that on *my* birthday, I want surf and turf all day.”

“Your birthday’s not until February.”

“That’s why I need a reminder.”

I grinned and cut into the steak. The fact that he was talking about months from now didn’t escape my notice. Like he expected us to still be this close.

Was that even possible? There was no way I could watch Travis put on a front in public and flirt with other guys, not after all this.

But we couldn’t exactly just… What? Be together? What would people think? Shit, what would our parents think? Had Travis even considered that?

“Not gonna eat your steak?” Travis nodded at the forkful I held.

I slid the bite between my teeth, and it was just as delicious as the lobster. It was a good thing he knew me so well, because having to choose between the two would’ve been an impossible task.

After washing it down with my beer, I brought my napkin to my lips. “Have you thought about what Dad and Vera would say if they found out about us?”

Travis coughed around his mouthful of steak. “Why? You planning on telling them?”

“I mean, no. I haven’t exactly planned anything when it comes to… this.”

“This?” He cocked a grin. “Fucking your stepbrother wasn’t on your to-do list?”

“Was it on yours?”

“Yes.”

I knocked my leg against his. “I’m serious.”

“So am I.” He took a sip of his wine and shrugged. “I think they’d be impressed if they could see us right now. They’re the ones who wanted us to get along.”

“I don’t think they meant like this.”

“No? Having sex and breaking tables too much?”

I smirked. “Maybe a little.”

“It’s a better alternative than hating each other, don’t you think?”

“I mean…yeah. But—”

“But what? Who cares what anyone else thinks? It’s not their life.” As I let those words sink in, he took another swallow of wine and then added, “Besides, I’m pretty sure my mom knows something’s up anyway.”

My fork fell to the plate with a clank. “What?”

“I’m not exactly the subtlest person in the world, and she knows me. She knew how close we always were and that I had a massive crush on you. I highly doubt she and Dick would’ve encouraged us to move in together if they had a problem with it. Especially knowing I’d be tempted to make move on you.”

Holy hell, was he serious? All I could do was stare at him as my mind tried to make sense of what he was saying.

Was it possible Vera knew what had torn us apart all this time? And my dad?

“Oh my God.”

Travis’s brow creased and he reached out to rest his fingers over mine. “Don’t freak out. They don’t *actually* know anything. No one does. It’s just you and me. Okay?”

I looked down at where our hands touched. His nails were painted dark, almost black, such a contrast to mine. Just a small example of how different we were, and yet…

“I’m not freaking out,” I said, lifting my gaze to meet his. “Just processing.”

And it was true. I didn’t know why I felt such relief in that moment when I’d expected to feel the opposite, but just the idea that our parents

weren’t completely oblivious and might not disown us for something others would…it was like a weight off somehow. Even if Travis and I hadn’t defined what was happening between us.

“Everything is satisfactory, I hope?” the chef asked as she brought us refills.

I didn’t move my hand or my gaze away from Travis’s, just watched him through the flickering candlelight.

“It’s perfect,” I said, and Travis smiled. One of those proud but almost shy and utterly sexy smiles that made my boxer briefs way too tight.

“Happy to hear it. Dessert is ready whenever you are.”

“Actually, I think we’re good for the night,” Travis said. “You’re free to go.”

“I’ll have my assistant come by in the morning to clean up. Enjoy your evening.”

We said our thanks as she quietly left, and when the door clicked shut, I linked my fingers through Travis’s. He brought our joined hands up to press a kiss to my knuckles.

“Have you had a good day?” he asked.

“Mhmm. There’s just one more thing I want for my birthday.”

“Yes.”

I smirked. “You don’t know what it is, though.”

“It’s yours anyway. What do you want?”

Pushing away from the table, I kept our hands joined as I got to my feet. “For you to make me yours.”

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THIRTY-SEVEN

caleb

IT WASN'T OFTEN Travis was at a loss for words, but as I stood there staring down into his gorgeous face, I could tell I'd shocked him.

His electric-blue eyes were full of confused excitement. He wanted what I was offering, I knew that. He just wasn't sure if he understood what I was throwing down.

"Just so I'm clear," Travis said, moving to his feet. "When you say you want me to make you mine, what *exactly* do you mean?"

Yep. I'd totally confused the poor guy.

I took the final step between us, then lowered my lips by his ear and cleared up any and all confusion. "I *mean*, I want you to take me to my room, take off my clothes, and do all the things you've ever imagined doing to me."

Travis pulled away a fraction. "You're serious?"

I tightened my fingers around his and began walking us back toward my room, letting my actions answer for me.

Was I serious? Damn right I was. I'd been thinking about this moment for a couple of weeks now. Whether or not I'd want it and whether or not I'd be brave enough to ask. The idea of opening myself up to Travis like this scared the hell out of me. But so did the thought of never knowing him that way.

Skin to skin…

Mouth to mouth…

Body to body…

I knew he'd make it good for me. That he'd do everything in his power to make sure this was as perfect as our day had been, and that had me stopping at my bedroom door and turning back to face him.

"I want this," I reiterated, and just to make sure there were no questions lingering between us, I added, "I want you to be my first."

"Fuck, Caleb."

My lips quirked as I parted my legs and drew him in between them. "That's exactly what I'm hoping you'll do."

Travis squeezed my fingers, then leaned in to nip at my lower lip. "You're sure?"

I jutted my hips forward, rubbing my erection against his so he could feel just how sure I was. "One hundred percent."

Travis nodded and stepped back, letting go of my hand, and for a second I thought he was about to turn me down until—

"I can do *all* the things I've ever imagined?"

His wicked smile had my heart pounding in time with my dick. "That's right."

"Sooo we're not going to leave our condo for the next month or so, then. Have you told our teachers, friends, *family* about this?"

"Very funny." But the teasing glint in his eyes was so damn sexy he had me reaching down to rub the heel of my palm over myself.

"Because once I get you in that room and get inside you, I'm not sure I'm gonna want to let you go. That okay with you?"

Hell yes it is. I didn't care if he wanted to stay there for a whole year, as long as he kept looking at me like that.

Travis slicked his tongue over his lower lip, his eyes roving over me. "Want to know the first thing I've imagined when it comes to you?"

My ability to talk seemed to have disappeared when all the blood rushed south, so I settled for nodding.

"I've imagined walking in on you when you're completely naked. Not shirt off or half undressed but fully fucking naked, standing at the end of your bed, waiting for me."

That was damn hot, to know that someone as sexy and as uninhibited as Travis had fantasized about me.

"So let's start there."

I swallowed and nodded again, then reached for the handle and opened my door. It was a miracle I didn't stumble as I turned to rush inside, and I

looked back, expecting to see Travis behind me. But he remained where he'd been seconds ago, standing just outside the door.

I frowned. "You're not coming?"

"Oh, I'll be coming, but I want to be inside you when I do, so I'm going to wait out here while you strip. And Caleb?"

"Yeah?"

"Wait for me at the foot of your bed, facing your mattress."

Holy. Shit. Okay. I could do this.

Was I nervous? Fuck yes. Was I more turned on than I had ever been in my life? Also fuck yes.

I moved further into my room, thankful we'd played around in here enough that there were supplies on hand for whatever Travis had in mind, because the last thing I wanted to do right now was stop and ask questions. Not with the sexual tension that was humming between us.

God, how had I ever been able to ignore it? It was so tangible, the way it wound around us and pulled us together like an invisible rope, and I was done fighting it. I wanted Travis to take me, finally make me his.

I kicked off my shoes and quickly unbuttoned my shirt, tossing it over the chair at my desk. My jeans were next, followed by my socks, and when all that was left was my boxer briefs, I stripped out of them and walked over to the foot of the bed.

My rumpled duvet looked inviting as I stared down at it. The wide bed made my breath come a little faster as I imagined what was about to happen in it over the next few hours.

The crazy thing was, I felt like this was my first time—*ever*.

My excitement and arousal was mixed with nerves and had my stomach all jumbled. It wasn't like this was even the first time Travis and I had been naked together. I'd taken him the other night, right here, in my bed. But the idea of Travis taking *me* there was an entirely different thing.

There was a soft knock on my door as it was slowly pushed open, and then I heard it click shut behind me.

"Goddamn. Look at you." Travis's voice echoed around the room as the sound of his feet on the hardwood accompanied the ringing in my ears. Then I felt it, that invisible rope winding around the two of us as he shifted in behind me.

He hadn't touched me anywhere, not with his hands, not with his mouth, but his mere presence set every nerve ending on fire as he stopped

only inches from me.

“Caleb, I…” Travis’s words got stuck on whatever he’d been about to say, and just as I was about to ask if everything was okay, he added, “I wanted to be so *cool* when I walked in here.” He chuckled, and the gravelly sound sent goosebumps racing all over my skin. “Show you all my moves. Do all the dirty things. But you’re so fucking beautiful, I’m almost scared to touch you.”

I sucked in a breath at the almost reverent way he said those last few words, then turned to face him. Still fully clothed, he was hands down the sexiest guy I’d ever seen in my life. Always had been. With his kohl-lined eyes, pouty lips, and an appetite for sin, Travis was everything I’d ever wanted. So why had I ever denied myself?

I had no idea. But that was going to stop here and now.

“Scared?” I reached for his hand, drawing it up to place it on my chest. “What are you scared of? It’s just me.”

“That’s exactly it. It’s *you*, Caleb.”

He slid his palm to where my heart thumped harder with every word that left his mouth.

“What if I hurt you?”

I smiled at this sudden show of vulnerability. Here I was standing completely naked, and yet I was the one comforting him.

“You won’t hurt me.”

“I don’t just mean physically.”

So that’s what he was worried about. That if he took me like this, was my first, I would expect forever?

“Travis?”

He raised those incredible eyes back to mine, and I couldn’t stop my body from reacting as it always did when I had his attention. My cock hardened and my pulse raced.

“I don’t need promises or declarations of love.” I swallowed and dragged his hand down my body to my aching dick. “What I *need* is you. It’s always been you.”

Travis groaned, and it was like I’d flipped a switch, as he wrapped his fingers around my stiff length.

My head fell back as he started to slowly stroke up and down my shaft, his fist eliciting a guttural moan from deep in my throat.

“Oh fuck yes,” he murmured, and any hesitation he’d felt vanished as he lowered his head and pressed his lips to my neck. “I’ve wanted you for so damn long…”

I reached for his arms to keep my knees from giving out. “Then take me.”

Travis nipped his way up to my jaw and across my cheek to my lips. “By the time I’m done with you, no one else will do.”

He was right. I already knew that. I’d known it the night in the club when he’d kissed me. Hell, I’d known it the night of our parents' wedding when he’d first kissed me. For years I’d tried to replace him, tried to wipe him from my memory. But no one had ever come close, and I knew no one ever would.

“Give me your tongue, Caleb.”

I immediately obeyed, wanting another taste of him more than my next breath. The second I teased at his lips, Travis opened for me.

The hand around my dick tightened as I tangled my tongue with his, and when I rocked forward, pushing myself through his fist, Travis moaned and took a step forward, and my calves hit the end of my bed.

“Shit.” Travis took a step back, touching his swollen lips. “I feel like this is *my* first time. I’m in so much fucking trouble with you.”

I couldn’t help my smile as I reached down to take over the stroking of my very hard cock. “Is that such a bad thing?”

“No.” Travis shook his head, then a slow, sensual smile curved his lips. “It’s perfect, actually. You should’ve been my first. Now turn back around. Let me see what trouble I’ll be getting into.”

There was the Travis I knew and lov—

Knew.

Sexy, confident, and bossy, the flirt was back in full force. When I turned to face the bed, he was immediately behind me, trailing his fingertips over my back, across my shoulder blades, and down my spine.

Then warm lips brushed over the base of my neck, sending a jolt of lust right through me.

“I will never get tired of looking at you like this.”

“No?”

“Never,” he whispered by my ear. “Move onto the bed. Face down. This sweet ass up.”

I grinned as I put a knee to the mattress and climbed onto it, moving to the center of the bed.

“Fuckin’ hell,” he said from behind me, which was followed by the rustling of clothes, and then Travis’s shirt hit the mattress beside me. “Spread your legs for me.”

The order was so damn hot that my dick lurched against my covers and I had to reach down to readjust myself.

“Oh shit,” Travis groaned, and I froze, thinking I’d done something wrong. “No. Don’t stop. I just can’t decide what I want more—you lying there waiting for me, or you getting yourself off while I watch.”

I chuckled at his put-out tone, but kept working myself against the bed.

“Fuck. Yeah. Okay, that. Move up to your knees a little. I want to see.” Travis’s words came in ragged breaths, his orders getting choppier as I did exactly what he said. “Jesus. You’re so fucking hard.”

No shit. I was so turned on from what he was saying and making me do that it was a miracle I hadn’t come already. Then his pants hit the bed by my head and my orgasm seriously threatened.

“Wait,” I rushed out, clamping my hand around the root of my cock. “I need… Give me a second.”

The mattress dipped behind me and a pair of warm, wet lips found the round curve of my ass cheek. “You can have five. Then I want you up on your hands and knees. It’s time to get you ready for my dick.”

If he thought that was going to calm me down, he couldn’t have been more wrong. But as he moved off the bed, I tried to channel my thoughts.

Deep breath in…

Deep breath out…

Deep breath—

“Hands and knees, Caleb.” *Fuck.* “Show me where you want me.”

So much for that. Any calm I’d found disappeared as the bed shifted again and I moved up to the position he wanted me in. Then he smoothed his hands over my ass, his fingers flirting with my crack as he slowly spread me apart.

“Christ. How the hell am I supposed to go slow when you look this fucking good?”

I gripped my dick and squeezed. “Who’s asking for slow?”

“Impatient, huh?”

“Turned on,” I corrected him.

“Good. But if you can still talk, you’re not nearly as turned on as I need or want you to be.” A slippery finger moved between my cheeks and began to slide up and down my sensitive channel. “I want you mumbling incoherent thoughts as you beg me to fuck you.”

Oh God.

“That’s okay with you, right?”

I gritted my teeth and nodded, my cock jerking in my hand as pre-cum leaked from the tip down onto my covers. Then cool liquid splashed over my hole, making my ass clench.

“Fucking beautiful…” Travis muttered to himself, but his praise sent a hot flush over my body as his thumb began to massage my entrance. “I swear, every part of you is a damn masterpiece.”

I squeezed my eyes shut and gave myself a long pull, my pre-cum acting as lube as I worked myself closer to that fevered state of arousal. Travis gently pushed his thumb inside my body, dipping in and out, letting me get used to the new sensation, and when I started to sway back on him, wanting more, a longer, more nimble finger found its way inside me.

“Oh, hell yes. Look at the way you’re taking to this.” Travis’s voice was raspy as he added a second finger, scissoring them apart gently as he poured more lube inside. “I can’t wait to see my dick slide inside you. To watch your ass swallow me. Fuck, that’s it, show me how much you want it.”

It must’ve been a whole damn lot, because suddenly I couldn’t keep still. Between my fist polishing my stiff dick, and my ass chasing the fingers Travis was teasing me with, I was rocking back and forth on top of my bed like a guy on a bucking bronco.

“You have no idea how hot you look right now.”

If it was anything like how he looked when he was going out of his mind, I had *some* idea. But the fact he was thinking that while looking at *me* made everything that much hotter.

“Let’s see,” Travis said as he leaned down over me and pressed his lips against my shoulder blade. “You ready for me now?”

My breathing was coming in short, ragged bursts as the pleasure built inside me, and when all I could manage was a nod, Travis chuckled.

“Oh no, I want to hear it.” He flicked his tongue over my ear and then nipped at it. “I want to hear how desperate you are for me.”

“Yes,” I panted, and turned my head. “Fuck me. Now. I want to feel you inside me.”

Travis's lips curled, and before I knew it, his mouth was on mine in a kiss designed to blow my mind. His tongue thrust between my lips as his fingers penetrated my body. As he rocked over the back of me, mimicking what he was about to do with his dick, I had to pinch the head of my cock in an effort not to come.

With a final kiss to my mouth, he said, "You're mine," then disappeared behind me.

Travis removed his fingers, and the immediate loss was painful, until he nudged the wide head of his shaft between my cheeks and I felt that sexy piercing brush up against me. He paused.

"If you want to stop at any—"

Before he could even get the words out, I pushed back on him, taking him into my body where I needed him most. The shocked curse that fell from Travis's lips made me even bolder. "I don't want to stop. I want you to *start*."

Strong hands moved to my hips then, and I gripped the duvet under my fingers.

"Okay then, you greedy fucker. Let's see if you can keep up."

Travis slowly pulled me back, penetrating me inch by inch, and the delicious burn that radiated through me had nothing on the pleasure I was getting from my own hand and the fact that Travis—*my* Travis—was finally inside me.

His low groan was the best kind of soundtrack to what was happening, and I stored it away for future use when I was on my own. When he bottomed out and stilled inside me, it took a second for my body to adjust to the wide intrusion, and though it felt strange, it definitely didn't feel bad.

"Caleb?"

My arm shook where it held me up, and I moved down until I rested on my forearm. "I'm good. Just getting a better position."

As I shifted slightly so I still had access to my dick, Travis put one of his feet flat on the mattress just outside my leg, then curled his hands around the tops of my thighs, grinding deeper into me.

"*Ah*, fuck." I moaned at the sensations coursing through me. Pain. Pleasure. They were all mixed together now.

"Gonna do *that* the second you give me the go-ahead."

I licked at my lips and pressed my forehead to the pillow, letting my body get used to the intrusion. "I'm ready."

Travis slid a hand over my tailbone then gently smoothed it up and down my back as he started to rock in and out of me.

My fingers on the bed tore at the covers for traction as I began to roll my hips back, begging for more, and Travis gave it. He gripped my hips and pulled me back onto him, tunneling into me.

“I knew it.” He growled. “I knew you’d ruin me for anyone else.”

My heart just about stopped at his confession, as it mirrored my exact thoughts. No one had ever come close to affecting me the way Travis had, and after tonight, I knew no one ever would.

I was about to tell him that when he whispered, “I could stay buried in you for hours. Happily lose myself and never return…”

It was a delicious thought, a decedent promise, one that had me groaning into the pillow as he began to increase his pace. The emotions and sensations he was wringing from me urged my climax to the base of my spine until the head of his dick and that piercing found my G-spot and I knew there was no way I was going to last.

“Trav… Travis…” I stammered, trying to warn him I was about two seconds away from exploding all over the place. But he knew exactly what I was trying to say as he ramped up his pace.

“That’s it. I can feel it. Your body is vibrating for me, ready to go off.” Then he grabbed my hips and gave a full thrust. “Come for me, birthday boy. So I can get to blowing your candle next.”

That was it.

Travis’s words wrapped around me, and I tightened my hand around my cock at the same time my ass did his, then a spray of cum shot out of me and onto the duvet. My toes curled as pleasure hit, so intense it made my vision black out for a second, as Travis shouted my name and a hot current flooded my hole.

It was the most intense, earth-shattering moment I’d ever had. As I fell down on the mess I’d made and Travis fell on top of me, I’d never felt more at peace in my life.

This was who I was and exactly where I was supposed to be, and to hell with anyone who had a problem with that.

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THIRTY-EIGHT

travis

SILVER ZIPPERS ALL around the waist to wear it as a trench or a cropped jacket— Wait, no. I leaned back against the arm of the couch and held the sketchbook out, analyzing what I'd drawn with a critical eye.

"Nope. Gold. Definitely gold," I muttered to myself before ripping the page out and flinging it aside to start over.

I switched out my colored pencils and began the outline again, using my now-intimate knowledge of Caleb's body as a starting point. Because why not? He was gorgeous, even if he wasn't built like a fashion model. It was entertaining as hell to style him in something that was the polar opposite of his usual look, but he'd still rock this jacket.

Though he'd probably only agree to wear it on Halloween.

After making the zippers gold, I held the sketchbook out, pursing my lips as I looked it over and then grinned.

"I'm a fucking genius. Just give me all the awards now."

Flashy. Fun. Sexy as fuck. That pretty much summed up my style.

Hell, that should be my tagline.

Finally satisfied, I went to work on the rest of the small details as Caleb strolled down the hall with his cell phone attached to his ear.

"Uh huh… Try not to murder anyone… Well, if you need help hiding a body, I'm sure I know a few people." He smirked at me as he stopped behind the kitchen island. "Yeah, I'll tell him… Love you too."

He ended the call and grabbed a couple of sodas out of the fridge. "Dad says hi."

"He trying to get rid of Mom already?"

“Hah. No.” After popping the tab, he handed me the Coke. “More like Vera could use your pranking skills on her leading man. You know that guy who was in the *Lethal Weapon* reboot? Paul something.”

“Uh oh,” I said. “What’s he done? Do we need to take a little trip for some fuckery?”

I moved my feet so Caleb could sit on the other side of the couch, and after he sat down, he pulled my legs onto his lap. The move wasn’t anything major, but it made my stomach flip just the same.

“Dad said the first day of filming, Paul refused to come out of his trailer because one of the crew members was wearing a Lakers jersey, and it held everything up for hours.” Caleb rolled his eyes. “The ultimatum was either they fire the crew member or make him wear a Celtics jersey, which he refused to do.”

“So, what, they fired him?”

Caleb took a sip of his drink and nodded. “Yep. Paul’s number one on the call sheet, so whatever he says goes. Apparently it just got worse from there, but they’re both pissed.”

“Sounds like I need to call her later and give her a few fun ideas.” I grinned, already thinking up a few.

“I figured you would.” He ran his hand absently along my calves. So casual. So natural.

So right.

I took a swig of my soda and then switched it out on the table for a black pencil. “So did you mention…anything else?” *You know, like being hot for your stepbrother—no biggie.*

“Yeah, actually. I told him you took me to a brewery for my birthday.”

“To drown you in a keg?”

“No, to do something nice for me.”

My eyebrows shot up. “And he didn't think that was suspicious?”

Caleb shook his head, a line forming between his brows. “He seemed… relieved and kinda glad, actually. It makes me think…” He didn’t continue that train of thought, and I wiggled my foot in his lap.

“Makes you think what?”

He lifted his eyes to meet mine. “That you might be right. About them having a clue about us.”

“Yeah?” I watched him carefully, trying to read into every little twitch and move he made, constantly waiting for the ball to drop. “How does that

make you feel?”

“I think we passed any last freak-out stage last night, don’t you?” The wicked curve to his lips made my shoulders instantly relax, even as my dick jerked beneath my sketchpad. Jesus, that memory was seared into my brain for life. Just thinking about being inside Caleb made me desperate to have him again, but his ass needed a rest after his first time.

It would happen. The way he was looking at me told me that much.

“Guess he doesn’t think I’m such a bad influence after all,” I teased, nuzzling my toes between his thighs to massage his cock.

Caleb groaned and rolled his head on the back of the couch to look at me. “Really? You call this being a good one?”

“A *very* good one, yes.”

His eyes sparked with amusement as he stilled my foot. “Maybe he figures you’ll be less of a shit if we’re getting along.”

“You should’ve told him just how well we’re getting along. And how many times.”

“Have you told Vera?”

“Not yet.”

“Not *yet*?”

“What? You don’t think she’ll want all the juicy details?”

“Oh my God.”

I laughed at the horrified look on his face. “I’m kidding. We’re close, but not give-her-sex-details close.”

“Honestly, it wouldn’t surprise me if you did. You’ve never exactly been quiet about your sex life.”

“Just letting everyone know what a catch I am, can you blame me?”

Caleb’s lips twitched. “Not even a little bit.”

It was rare to find someone willing to accept all of you, quirks and all, but that was how it felt with Caleb, why I’d gravitated toward him right off the bat after meeting him, even though our friendship never should’ve worked. Why it had hurt so much when he wasn’t part of my life the last few years. I craved his acceptance. His opinion mattered more than anyone’s, and it’d been a stab in the gut every time he ignored me or glared my way.

That shit was never happening again, not if I could help it.

Leaning over, Caleb set his drink aside and picked up one of my discarded sketches. “I was wondering if you still did these.”

“Ugh, don’t look at that one.” I snatched it out of his hands, crumpled the paper into a ball, and tossed it across the room.

“Seriously, Travis?” He picked up another one. “If you hate it, why do you keep drawing the same design over and over?”

My jaw hit the floor. “The same design? I thought someone with such an expert eye would know the difference between disgusting and”—I flipped my sketchpad toward him—“*perfection*.”

Caleb frowned, glancing between the two like he couldn’t see any difference whatsoever, which would’ve made me lose all faith in his taste for fuck’s sake. “Ohh, I see it now. Gold not silver, right?”

I huffed. “I mean, it’s so obvious.”

“You’re right. This is trash.” He tore the paper in half, then into quarters, and tossed the pieces into the air.

“Smartass. You of all people should know it’s the details that matter.”

He shifted on the couch to face me and rested his arm along the cushion. Without his slouchy beanie, his brown hair was wild and sticking up in random places, though running my fingers through it was probably the biggest culprit. I couldn’t decide whether I liked the fact that he’d thrown on one of my vintage Queen t-shirts or if I hated that he wore any clothes at all.

Then again, he’d make the shirt smell as good as he did, so I’d be wearing *that* to school tomorrow so he’d be all over me all damn day.

“I can’t wait to photograph some A-list celebrity in a Travis McKinney original. We’ll make that shit go viral.”

“Yeah?”

“Hell yeah. Who could you see wearing that one?”

“Me.” I glanced up from the drawing and winked. “But maybe someone else with a rock kind of vibe. One of those Fallen Angel guys, maybe.”

“Ooh yeah. Viper would kill in that. He scowls almost as well as you do.”

I went to kick him in the thigh, but he caught my foot and laughed.

“I always reserved my scowls for *you*,” I said. “And my…sexy s*molders* for the camera.”

Caleb laughed even harder, his head falling back against the couch. “Pretty sure that’s the same thing.”

“It’s not, and you know it. My intention for the audience is to make them want to fuck me. My goal for you was to piss you off so you’d be

thinking about me all night.”

“Well, it worked. Everyone wanted to fuck you, and I could never get you out of my head.” He trailed his fingers up the inside of my calf and then my inner thigh. “I still can’t.”

I tossed my sketchpad and pencil aside and grabbed Caleb’s arm, pulling him to my side of the couch to straddle me. I couldn’t help it. I wanted to touch him all the time. He was just as much of an enabler to my greedy ways, though, taking my hands and placing them on his ass.

The loose sweatpants he wore were thin enough I could feel that he wasn’t wearing any boxer briefs under them.

Dammit, I was trying to behave myself. It was an impossible ask.

As I kneaded the curves of his ass, he ran the pad of his thumb along my lips.

“Thank you,” he said. “This weekend was perfect.”

“Was?” I arched a brow. “It’s not over yet.”

“Well, no, but you’re going out—”

“So are you.”

Caleb’s lower lip disappeared behind his teeth. “I’m not sure that’s such a good idea after last time.”

“Of course it is. I’ll be there to make sure East doesn’t feed you tequila all night.”

“They’ll all think something’s up if you *don’t* encourage East to get me fucked up.”

I rubbed my hands over his hips and down the front of his thighs. “You worry too much.”

“From what I heard, I tried to give someone a beatdown for dancing with you. You don’t think I’ll have a similar reaction if some guy’s all over you?”

I lifted my hips so my cock grazed the crease of his ass. “Jealousy looks so hot on you.”

“I’m serious.”

“So am I. Such a turn-on.”

Caleb narrowed his eyes and slowly moved up and down along my dick. “Then I guess I’ll see you on the dance floor. Find some stranger to rub his hands on my—”

I shot up so fast I almost knocked him off me. “Over my dead fucking body.”

He smirked. “Thought so.”

“That was mean,” I grumbled, settling back down to rest my head against the arm of the couch. “No dancing with anyone.”

“You gonna abide by that rule too?”

“I can’t dance?”

Caleb angled his head, thinking it over. “You can with one of the others. Gavin, maybe.”

My brows shot up. “And have Daire literally crush me in his fist? I like being manhandled, but that’s where I draw the line.”

“Fine. Donovan, then.”

“You think *his* boyfriend is any better than Daire? The guy’s six-five and has a dick the size of an elephant trunk.”

Caleb made a face. “I don’t even wanna know how you know that.”

Grinning, I linked my fingers through his and tugged him forward so his lips hovered over mine. I stole a quick kiss and then said, “Tell you what. We’ll both promise to be on our best behavior. No other guys, or girls for that matter. It’ll just be a fun night out with friends. It’s still your birthday weekend, so we can make it all about you.”

“You had me until that last part.”

“Okay, we’ll make it all about you when we get back home,” I amended.

“That’s more like it.”

“Mhmm.” I grazed my lips along his jaw and back down to his mouth. “So you agree to the terms?”

He angled his head and leaned in toward me, but I drew back to wait for his answer. “I agree.”

“Good. Then shut up and kiss me.”

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THIRTY-NINE

caleb

I EYED THE tray of shots with lime wedges going around the VIP and backed away.

"Abso-fucking-lutely not," I said, holding tight to my beer. They weren't getting me again. I'd be abstaining from tequila for the rest of my life.

"Oh, live a little, birthday boy," West said, grabbing one off the tray and forcing it into my hands. "It's just a kamikaze."

I narrowed my eyes on the contents of the small glass. "It looks like there's tequila in this."

"It's vodka," Travis clarified from where he stood across the circle from me with a put-on smirk on his face. "You know, the *other* clear liquid."

I had to admit, it was kinda hot battling it out with Travis, only the two of us knowing what was really going down between us. The way he looked at me now just felt different, a more teasing, heated glint to his eyes that set my body on edge.

But in front of the others, the barbs were still there, though I could see the suspicion as they looked between the two of us.

I brought the shot up and lifted my brows at everyone. "What, you're not gonna sing to me?"

"What, you think you're special or something?" East said before his lip curled. "Fine, you want a song, how about a cheers instead." He cleared his throat and held up his glass. "To Caleb, who thought he was too good for us but came slinking back and now wants us to make a big deal about his birthday. Happy fuckin' birthday."

He gave me a shit-eating grin and threw his shot back, but the rest of the group all just stared at him.

“That was kinda shitty,” Preston said.

Gavin nodded. “Yeah, I’m not drinking to that.”

“It was just a joke.” East rolled his eyes.

“Jokes are usually funny,” Gavin said.

“When did you all get so sensitive? Jesus.”

West clapped his hand on East’s shoulder. “I’ll take this one.” He lifted his glass. “Caleb, happy birthday. Even though you almost sabotaged my relationship with JT by talkin’ shit, I’ll forgive and forget as soon as you and Travis do.”

JT’s jaw practically hit the ground as he turned to face his boyfriend. “West, what the hell?”

West winked at me and downed his shot, and okay, there was still some pent-up hostility some of us needed to work through, but that didn’t matter to me. As long as Travis and I were good, who gave a shit about anyone else?

“Well, I have something to say,” JT announced, facing my way and giving me a genuine smile as East groaned behind him. “Caleb, you were the first person who befriended me when I started at Astor, and I couldn’t ask for a better best friend. Especially one who tried to get me to see the red flags I couldn’t, because that’s what someone who cares about you does. I’m glad you’re in my life, and I’m glad you’re hanging around this group again so I don’t have to deal with petty assholes by myself.”

“I’ll cheers to that,” I said, grinning broadly and clinking my glass against his. The shot was actually really damn tasty, a far cry from tequila, and I asked the hostess to bring another round as I threw my arm around JT’s neck. “Appreciate it, man.”

“They really are glad you’re back, you know,” he said. “That’s why they give you so much shit. If they didn’t like you, you wouldn’t be standing here.”

I winked at him. “I know.”

“Good. Because you can’t leave me.”

Grinning, I looked up, caught Travis watching us, and felt my heart give a little squeeze. “Don’t worry. I’m not goin’ anywhere.”

“Not even the dance floor?” Donovan moved in beside us, Kelly right behind him, and all I could suddenly think about as I looked at him were…

elephants.

Fuckin' Travis.

"Caleb?"

"Huh?"

My eyes shifted back to Donovan, who had a frown on his face. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Just zoned out for a second there." *Imagining how big an elephant's trunk actually is because—wow.*

"So you want to hit the dance floor with me? Kelly's ankle got hurt the other night when… Well, he's just resting an injury, and I could use a partner."

I tried to remember if Donovan had been one of the guys Travis deemed off-limits, but in the end followed him out to the floor knowing if I lingered any longer he'd think I was a total basket case.

The music throbbed through the club, pulsing in time with the lights that were flashing over the sea of bodies, and I had to admit, I'd missed hitting the club with these guys. They might not always be the nicest to each other—and especially to me—but they sure as hell knew how to have a good time.

VIP lounges. Top-shelf liquor. And the only people around you were the ones invited.

It was…nice. I didn't have to worry about being approached or hit on, though several girls eyed me from across the crowd as they moved together, laughing and throwing back shots of God knows what.

If it had been a couple of weeks ago I'd be making my way over there, flashing a smile, and seeing if one of them wanted to dance.

Okay, let's be real, I'd be asking the blonde *to dance.*

But now my attention was directed elsewhere. As my eyes slid past the giggling group of girls to the lounge where Donovan and I had left the rest of the guys, I searched out a very specific *dark* head of hair, and what do you know, Travis was looking right at me.

He was standing by the ropes of the VIP area, drink in hand, watching me with unmistakable interest. The heat in his blue gaze scorched a fiery path right to me, and as the music switched to something a little sultrier, I decided to give him a show.

The play of lights afforded me the discretion I needed to tease him with the slide of my hands and roll of my hips, and unless someone was looking

for it, they'd just assume I was moving to the beat.

Travis knew better, though. The subtle finger sliding up and down his glass and his tongue swiping his lower lip told me that, and when I slipped my hand under my shirt, he downed the rest of his drink then made his way out of the lounge.

Fuck. Oh fuck.

The predatory look in his eyes made my dick react in a way that would be difficult to explain if Donovan—or anyone else from our group—noticed. But there was no way to stop my body's reaction as Travis prowled through the crowd of people like an animal on the hunt.

My breathing kicked up, and I couldn't decide if I was excited or worried that he was headed my way until he stopped a few feet from where Donovan and I were and started to dance.

My pulse raced as the music switched to a slightly faster, more throb-heavy beat, and Travis began to move his hips in a way that brought to mind tangled sheets, naked skin, and his hips grinding up hard against mine.

Jesus. He was so much better at this than I was. He just had to walk from one side of the club to the other and he had me hard as a fucking rock. Watching him dance and eye-fuck me through the crowd? It was all I could do not to reach down and get myself off to the show.

And I wasn't the only one.

That was clear by the many eyes on him, not to mention several guys who approached and tried to get his attention. But true to his word, Travis merely gave a flirty smile and sent them on their way. His body was reserved for me tonight, and *that* was the hottest fucking thing ever.

As he rolled his hips, he trailed his hand down over his chest, and I lost the beat, so fixated on what he was doing.

I wasn't supposed to be watching him. Even out of the corner of my eye I could feel stares in our direction, and I had to force myself to angle my body more toward Donovan to at least make it look like I wasn't drooling over Travis.

But I was. It felt physically wrong for me to be so far away from him, to not have my hands replacing his own as they smoothed their way down his hips.

A gentle touch on my back had me glancing over my shoulder to see the blonde girl who'd been watching me. She swayed to the music, a smile on her red lips as she said, "You're too hot to be dancing all alone."

From seemingly out of nowhere, Donovan stepped in between us and put his hand on my waist. “He’s not alone.”

Before I could respond, he was pulling me away, blocking her view of me as we moved in Travis’s direction.

Oh shit. Travis’s stare was glacial, but for once it wasn’t directed at me. He’d stopped moving, and it was only once he saw us walking away from her that he began to slowly dance again, though his body was still tense.

I caught his eyes, falling into those blue depths again, and he visibly relaxed, allowing himself to get back into the music.

I sighed with relief as I faced Donovan again, still half turned toward Travis.

“Thanks for the save,” I said as the music changed to something slower. “I’m not really up for all that tonight.”

“I had a feeling.” There was a knowing look on Donovan’s face that made me wonder just how much he saw.

Then again, he’d just cockblocked me from a woman, ensuring Travis wouldn’t lose his ever-loving mind.

Donovan definitely knew *something*. He looked over at Kelly in the VIP and winked at him, and the fact that he didn’t come running down here on his bad ankle to kick my ass was surprising.

If Travis had made a public claim on me, I had no doubt that even one of his friends getting close to me would’ve been a *fuck no* in his book.

Which meant Kelly was comfortable letting Donovan dance with me because…

He knew too.

One by one, I found each of the princes casually—and not so casually in some cases, like a glaring East—looking between me and Travis.

What the hell was I doing?

Travis and I weren’t hiding anything from anyone. Shit, even our parents seemed to have a clue there was more between us, and all of a sudden everything became so clear. I didn’t want to be over here dancing with Donovan or anyone else—I wanted to dance with Travis.

The reason for our animosity no longer existed, so why the fuck was I still holding back? I didn’t want to lose Travis now that I finally had him. But it was clear that if I didn’t do something, and fast, someone would be right there ready to take my place.

Yeah, that was so not going to happen.

With my mind made up, I zeroed in on the man who consumed every waking second of my life, and decided it was now or never.

I crossed the dance floor, weaving my way through gyrating bodies, my sights set on one body in particular. Travis glanced my way, catching sight of me, and everything I was feeling must've been written all over my face because a seductive smile curved his lips and he crooked a finger at me.

I didn't care who was watching us now *or* what they'd think. Nothing, save a natural disaster, was going to stop me from going to him.

The second I stepped into his orbit, it was like time stood still. Travis reached out and hooked a finger into my waistband, pulled me in, and said by my ear, "Couldn't stay away, huh?"

"It was torture." I looped my arms around his neck, and when his lips brushed up against the side of mine, I shivered.

"You know everyone can see us, right?"

I glanced over my shoulder to see every single one of our friends hooting and hollering in our direction, and East looking bored as hell, then turned back to look at the sexiest prince of all.

"Ask me if I care."

"I don't think I need to, but…" Travis slid his hands around to my ass and gave a tight squeeze. "Does that mean I get to kiss—"

I cut his words off with my lips, because damn right it meant he could kiss me, and that I could kiss him right back, and judging by the piercing wolf whistles I heard above the music, our moron friends were okay with that too.

Which was good to hear, because I didn't plan to stop kissing Travis McKinney anytime soon. Or ever.

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FORTY

travis

Six weeks later

“FOR ONCE I’VE got you on a red carpet instead of behind it,” I said by Caleb’s ear as several photographers behind the velvet rope snapped their shots of us and the other attendees heading into Ledger Gallery.

Tonight was a huge deal. Caleb had been selected as a featured artist, with a whole collection of his photographs being exhibited. I, for one, couldn’t wait to see his work, since a) I knew he only took gorgeous pictures, and b) he’d been keeping the collection a secret.

Beside me, Caleb shifted uncomfortably, no doubt wishing he was back in jeans and a slouchy beanie instead of the suit Vera had encouraged him to wear. I’d stayed out of that discussion. If Caleb wanted fashion advice, he’d come to me for it, not the other way around.

Although seeing him rock a sexy see-through pantsuit would’ve been hot as fuck.

“This may be where you thrive,” he said, “but I’m ready to cross back over to the other side.”

“Not tonight you don’t. You’re the featured artist. So smile or smolder for the cameras, please.”

He cracked a grin at that and glanced at me. I’d been working the line, eye-fucking the cameras, but one look at him and I forgot they were even there.

Not the smartest thing on a step-and-repeat.

“All right, all right, keep moving, ya lovebirds,” West said from behind us as he shooed us away to take our spot with JT, who mouthed, *Sorry,* in our direction.

I could feel the relief coming off Caleb at just the mention of being done, and I chuckled, resting my hand on his lower back to lead him off the red carpet.

“Better?” I said as we stepped inside the gallery, where a huge crowd was already milling about.

Caleb stopped walking suddenly and pivoted to face me. “Oh shit.”

I knew that look. Like he’d moved from one horror to another.

“You just realized people are gonna look at your work now,” I said.

He nodded, and I held my hand out for him to take if he wanted it. No pressure. We were out to our friends and family, but I left it up to him how much PDA he wanted to show around others.

But Caleb didn’t hesitate, taking my hand and linking our fingers, then giving me a grateful squeeze.

“I don’t know why I’m so nervous,” he said.

“Me either. I’ve stalked your stuff for years, and trust me, it’s light-years better than whatever that is.” I wrinkled my nose at the abstract painting on the wall.

Caleb’s lips curved. “Thank you.”

“What? I’m being serious. That’s”—I leaned in a little closer to read the tiny price tag at the bottom then spun back to face him—“waaay overpriced.”

Caleb chuckled and put a finger to my lips. “Shh—you never know where the artist might be.”

I nipped at the pad of his finger and grinned. “I’m just saying, you’ve got nothing to worry about. Now where’s your adoring fan club?”

“If by that you mean our parents…” Caleb scanned the crowd, looking at the guests milling around the different artwork, some hanging from the walls and several different vases set on podiums, which seemed like a risky idea, considering it was an open bar. “Ugh, over there, with some of the other parents. Geez, what’d they do, send out a bulletin to *every* Elysium member?”

“Probably. They want to show you off. They’re proud of you. Plus, they know who has extra cash to spend.”

The color drained a little from Caleb’s face, so when a waiter walked by with a tray of fancy cocktails, I snagged a couple and handed one over.

He sniffed it and quickly shook his head. “Uh uh, no way am I drinking that. It practically singed my nostrils.”

I wasn’t nearly as concerned about the strength of the alcohol as I took a long sip. “Okay, you’re right. That is strong. Let me find you a water.”

As I went to go do just that, Caleb snagged my arm, halting me. “No, no. Don’t go. I need you here.”

My heart swelled at the confession. I loved that after all this time, I was now a source of comfort for him. “Moral support?”

“That and, um, well… Just come with me.” Caleb put his full glass back on a waiter’s tray as he started to lead me through the gallery, and I had to remind myself this might’ve been the first time I’d been here, but it definitely wasn’t Caleb’s. He’d been over the damn moon when Claudia, the curator of the gallery, called asking if he’d like to be the featured artist of this exhibit. Ledger Gallery was apparently one of his favorite haunts in Chelsea. So as we weaved through the crowds, I wasn’t surprised to see him wave at a few of the people we passed by.

“Quite the celebrity here, aren’t you?” I said.

Caleb grinned but said nothing as we continued on toward our parents and some of the guys who were milling about nearby.

“Ah, there he is,” Richard said as we approached. “The man of the hour. We were wondering if we’d have to send out a search party.”

“Not a chance,” I said, squeezing Caleb’s fingers in support. “I wasn’t about to let him miss the biggest night of his life.”

“Way to not make me stress even more.”

The first dinner back at our parents’ had been an interesting one. Having to break it to them that their sons preferred to be lovers? No big, incestuous deal at all. Thank fuck they were more open-minded than I'd given them credit for—well, Dick, anyway. Mom had always been a little outside the box. It seemed like even as strange as the situation was, they’d been so frustrated by our fighting over the years that if we wanted to be together, they weren’t going to stand in the way. I was actually pretty impressed by that, considering the crowd at the Elysium was a bunch of gossipy rich bitches who would find the whole thing too scandalous.

Even more surprising? They hadn’t even noticed we’d replaced their table.

“Darling,” Mom said, moving forward to kiss Caleb’s cheek. “You have nothing to be stressed about. Your work is magnificent.”

“On my laptop,” Caleb said with a sigh. “This is totally different. No one’s ever seen my work quite like this.”

“You mean printed, framed, and fucking fabulous?”

“Travis,” Mom admonished, but her small smile softened the blow.

“I’m sorry. You mean printed, framed, and fabulous.”

“Much better.”

I rolled my eyes, and Caleb shrugged. “Well, yeah, but what if no one likes them?”

“Would you stop that?” I bumped into his shoulder. “Everyone is going to love them. And if they don’t, fu—” I glanced at my mom. “Forget them.”

“Travis is right.” Richard clapped his son on the shoulder. “No matter what happens tonight, you should be proud that you were asked.”

I could tell by the halfhearted smile Caleb forced that unless he sold every single photo tonight he would be nothing but disappointed, so of course I had my credit card on hand in case I had to make that happen.

“Caleb.” A willowy woman in a pencil skirt, sky-high stilettos, and prim Victorian blouse stopped beside our group, flashing a confident smile in Caleb’s direction. “Well, don’t you scrub up just fine.”

Better than fine, if you asked me. But since I was minding my Ps and Qs tonight, I decided not to correct her.

“Hey, Claudia. Is everything ready to go?”

“It sure is. So I’m glad I could track you down. We’re just about to unveil your feature.”

“Oh God.” Caleb put a hand to his stomach, and I quickly looked around for some kind of bucket in case he tossed his cookies. Hell, maybe I could just use one of those vases we’d passed on the way in.

“Don’t be like that. Everyone is going to love your work.”

He blew out a long breath and then nodded. “Okay, let’s get this over with.”

We followed Claudia to one of the closed-off rooms with a crowd gathered by the doors already. Caleb’s hand bumped against mine, and I squeezed his fingers before letting go so he could join Claudia.

“Ledger Gallery is proud to present the first collection by a new, incredible, and talented photographer, Caleb Reeves.” It wasn’t just

applause that met my ears as she opened the doors to the exhibit, but also whoops and shouts from our friends somewhere in the crowd.

As a steady stream of bodies entered the room, I lost sight of Caleb. But I could hear the oohs and aahs from those who were getting the first look, and jealousy at not being in the front had me pushing my way forward.

I could see Daire's head above the crowd and headed in his direction. He had his arms crossed and was frowning at the photograph on the wall while Gavin tugged on the belt loop of his jeans to get him to move on.

"Have a thing for lions?" I said, moving in beside him to get a good look. This one must've been taken on Caleb's South African trip last summer, and he'd caught a particularly vicious shot. A lion in full attack mode, leaping through the air and about to land on an unsuspecting wildebeest.

I hoped like hell the aftermath of that encounter wasn't posted anywhere, but I couldn't deny how impactful the photo was.

"Looks like me in the ring," Daire said, nodding. "I'll take it."

Gavin's eyes went wide. "Don't you wanna look at some others first?"

"No."

"There might be one you like even better. That maybe doesn't scare people when they walk in our place."

"I'll put it in my room."

Gavin looked past his boyfriend, eyes silently pleading for me to help Daire move on to something that wouldn't give him nightmares.

But where was the fun in that?

"Enjoy," I said, clapping Daire on the shoulder. "I'll let Caleb know he made his first sale."

"Thanks a lot," Gavin mumbled as I passed, and I couldn't help but laugh.

I was here to make sure none of Caleb's photos went unclaimed, and this was a hell of a start.

I found my guy standing in front of a landscape-sized picture of a herd of elephants walking a dusty trail, their massive bodies enclosed around a little calf protectively.

"Gorgeous," I said, resting my chin on his shoulder.

He grinned. "Me or the elephants?"

"Gotta admit, it's a hard call." I straightened and moved to his side but stayed close enough that our arms touched. "So this is what you did all

summer while I tanned in Ibiza.”

“And you blame Dad for saying you have no direction.” He arched a teasing brow.

“I don’t think my outfits are safari-proof. Can you see me wearing khaki?”

“Not even if someone paid you.”

Grinning, I looked over all of the work showcased on this wall. Claudia was right—it was incredible. I didn’t know shit about photography, but even I could see that the contrast of color and the close-ups he'd captured were out of this world. It made my heart swell with pride.

Before I could say just that, he bit down on his lower lip and inclined his head for me to follow him.

“Taking me to a dark corner to have your way with me?” I whispered in his ear, hoping I wasn’t far off.

But as we rounded the corner, there were no dark hiding places in sight. There was, however, a room full of Travis fuckin’ McKinney.

My jaw hit the floor so hard it probably cracked the tile.

On every wall, photographs of all sizes showcased *me*. Several from when we were younger, when I’d make him take pictures of me modeling my outfits. Some at red carpet events, catching me at just the perfect time when I wasn’t looking his way. Which, to be honest, was rare, so that made it all the more impressive.

My feet began to move before I made the conscious decision to, taking me farther into the room. The one of me he’d taken in the shower, wet jeans and all, looking down at the camera from above, was the biggest feature on the far wall. It was positioned so that it looked like I was staring down at anyone standing in front of it.

Holy shit. I looked *hot*.

I turned back to Caleb, who seemed to be holding his breath, waiting for my reaction, and a massive smile curved my lips.

“You really are a stalker.”

Caleb’s brow arched. “Seriously? That’s all you’re gonna say?”

I sauntered back over to where he was clearly waiting for my real reaction.

“Oh my fucking God.”

My eyes shifted past Caleb’s shoulder to West walking into the space, and as his eyes took in the splendor that was *me*, he started to shake his

head.

“As if Travis’s ego wasn’t big enough already.”

Donovan and Kelly were next through the door, the two of them much more appreciative of my form than West ever could be. They stepped up closer to the shower image and took in the shot.

“Damn, Caleb. This is some kind of hot.” Donovan cocked his head, looking up my body like he would if he were, say, *kneeling* on the ground in front of me. “Was this before…or after?”

No one standing in that room need clarification on what Donovan was referring to with the hungry look smoldering in my eyes. But that didn’t stop Caleb from shocking the shit out of me and saying, “Both, if my memory serves me right.”

Everyone’s head whipped in his direction.

“Which proves that you”—East pointed in my direction with his martini glass—“are a total traitor. This stalker exhibit proves that. You two were hooking up for months before you told us.”

“Um, no.” I looked at Caleb for permission to speak, and he nodded. “It just proves Caleb knew a beautiful fucking thing when he saw it and couldn’t resist capturing it in the wild.”

JT moved over to one of the photos of me standing on the red carpet at the Elysium, then glanced back at his BFF, disbelief stamped all over his face. “You were taking these all that time? But you hated him.”

East rolled his eyes. “Hate is such a strong word, Golden Boy. This was more like a sibling rivalry turned sexual situationship, right, boys?”

“Damn right,” I said, a proud grin on my face as I moved back to Caleb. Not even East could put me in a bad mood tonight.

“This is fuckin’ great.” I raised my voice and called out, “Everyone, feel free to put me on your wall. I’ll even sign it. So will Caleb.”

“You’ve created a monster,” Daire muttered to Caleb, and shook his head. “Count me out of one of these.”

Gavin nodded. “Yeah we’ll stick to the lions. We don’t need Travis’s ass over our couch.”

“Yes you do,” I said. “Everyone does. Look at it.” I pointed at the full-length shot of me lying on my stomach with my ass in the background. “That’s a perfect pair of cheeks right there.”

“Sweet Jesus.” Preston walked into the room, took one look around, and rubbed a hand over his face.

“Aw, don’t be shy.” I threw my arm around his shoulders. “I’ll help you pick one out for you and Archer.”

Preston groaned, I laughed, and out of the corner of my eye I saw Caleb watching me. There was a small smile playing on his lips and what looked like relief in his eyes, and it hit me then that he’d been worried about my reaction.

“So, Mr. Photographer.” I wandered over to him and took hold of his lapel, drawing him in close. “Which one of these is *your* personal favorite?”

Caleb cradled my face as he leaned in and brushed his lips across mine. “This one.”

I melted into his embrace right there in the middle of everyone, the sweet taste of his tongue lingering on my own as he swept it inside my mouth. How had I gone years without knowing him like this? Let a stupid miscommunication keep us apart the way it had? It was incomprehensible to me now, all that wasted time…

But I wasn’t going to think about that anymore, not when I finally had him in my arms, where he belonged.

“I meant of the photos.” I smoothed a hand down his chest and slipped it in under his jacket, pulling him to me. “You must have a favorite.”

“I do.” Caleb reached for my hand and then led me over to where the collection of me in the bedroom was displayed.

I had, of course, been drawn to my naked ass on full display at first, but as he tugged me in front of the framed images and moved behind me, I spotted the one in the middle. The one where I was laid out flat on my stomach, my chin propped up on my crossed arms and my gaze focused on the gorgeous photographer. My eyes had a blissed-out expression as I lounged in the bed, the sheet slung around my hips.

Caleb wound his arms around my waist and rested his chin on my shoulder. “This is my favorite photo.”

The sure way he said those words had a shiver racing up my spine. There was no indecision, no sexual undertone to his voice, just one hundred percent conviction. As though the second he’d seen this photo, he knew.

I swallowed, my heart thudding a little harder as the world seemed to fall away. “Why is it your favorite?”

Caleb grazed his lips across my temple as he tightened his arms around me then whispered by my ear, “Because I captured lightning in a bottle. The way you were looking at me matched exactly the way I feel.”

“And how’s that?”

“Like I love you.”

I stilled in his arms, positive I’d heard him wrong. That I was projecting all my wishful thinking onto him.

“You…” I tried to get the rest of my words out, but even my brain wasn’t on board at the moment.

Caleb turned me in his arms to face him, and this time I could see his lips move when he said, “I love you, Travis.”

“You do?” I didn’t know why that was all that wanted to come out, not when my insides were screaming and throwing a fucking party in there.

His arms around my waist tightened. “You’re the wilder, crazier half of me I can’t live without. Of course I do.”

“Thank God,” I said, my head falling back as I broke into a huge grin. “Because I love you too, and honestly, the idea of ever going back to just being brothers—”

“*Step*brothers,” Caleb said, making me chuckle.

“That wasn’t going to work for me.”

“Good thing we’re on the same page, then.”

I leaned up to press a kiss to his lips. “I mean, who wouldn’t love me?”

“*Love*?” East’s disgusted outburst was a jarring reminder that we weren’t alone, and before I could even begin to defend the two of us, he flipped us the finger and turned on the heels of his shiny leather loafers. “I’m out.”

I smirked as I watched him go. “He’s just jealous he’s not plastered all over these walls.”

“More like pissed he lost his wingman,” Caleb teased. “You weren’t supposed to fall in love, remember?”

“Well, I wasn’t about to let you get away again.” I ran my hands up over his biceps and pulled him in even closer. “You do know there’s no running from me now. I know where you live.”

“And if I try, I seem to remember you showing off a pair of handcuffs…”

A groan escaped me. “How long do you have to stay at this thing?”

“Pretty sure I’ve done my duty. Feeling antsy?”

I brushed my mouth over the top of his. “You have no fucking idea.” Then I leaned back, still wrapped in Caleb’s arms, and announced, “I expect

all of you to make a purchase and sell out my boyfriend's first show. Thank you, come again."

I grabbed Caleb's hand, and as we walked out of the showroom, I added, "Because we're sure gonna."

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thank you

Thanks for reading Salacious Park Avenue Prince!

We had such a fun time teasing the story between Travis and Caleb, and hope you fell for their sexy asses as hard as we did!

Well, it's no secret who's up next now, is it? The *real* question is, who in their right mind would put up with someone like James Easton…

Hmm, only time will tell.

Notorious Park Avenue Prince

Craving more of our Park Avenue Princes? You'll see all the guys again soon, including Travis and Caleb, in the next standalone in the series. But until then, you can read West and JT's story, Infamous Park Avenue Prince here:

Infamous Park Avenue Prince

Donovan and Kelly's story, Insatiable Park Avenue Prince here:

Insatiable Park Avenue Prince

Preston and Archer—Mr. Carrington's—story, Scandalous Park Avenue Prince here:

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about ella frank

Ella Frank is the *USA Today* Bestselling Author of the *Temptation series,* including Try, Take, and Trust and is the co-author of the fan-favorite *Fallen Angel series.* Her *Prime Time series* has been praised as “highly entertaining!” and “sexy as hell!”

A life-long fan of the romance genre, Ella is best known for her steamy, heartfelt, M/M romances.

If you’d like to get to know Ella better, you can find her getting up to all kinds of shenanigans at:

The Naughty Umbrella
(Facebook Group)

And if you would like to talk with other readers who love Ella’s character’s from her Chicagoverse, you can find them **HERE** at
Ella Frank’s Temptation Series Facebook Group.

Want to stay up to date with all things Ella?
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about brooke blaine

Brooke Blaine is a USA Today Bestselling Author best known for writing romantic comedy and M/M romance. Her novels lead with humor and heart, but Brooke never shies away from throwing in something extra naughty that will scandalize her conservative Southern family for life (bless their hearts).

She's a choc-o-holic, lives for eighties bands (which means she thinks guyliner is totally underrated), believes it's always wine o'clock, and lives with the coolest cat on the planet—her Ragdoll/Maine Coon mix, Jackson Agador Spartacus.

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